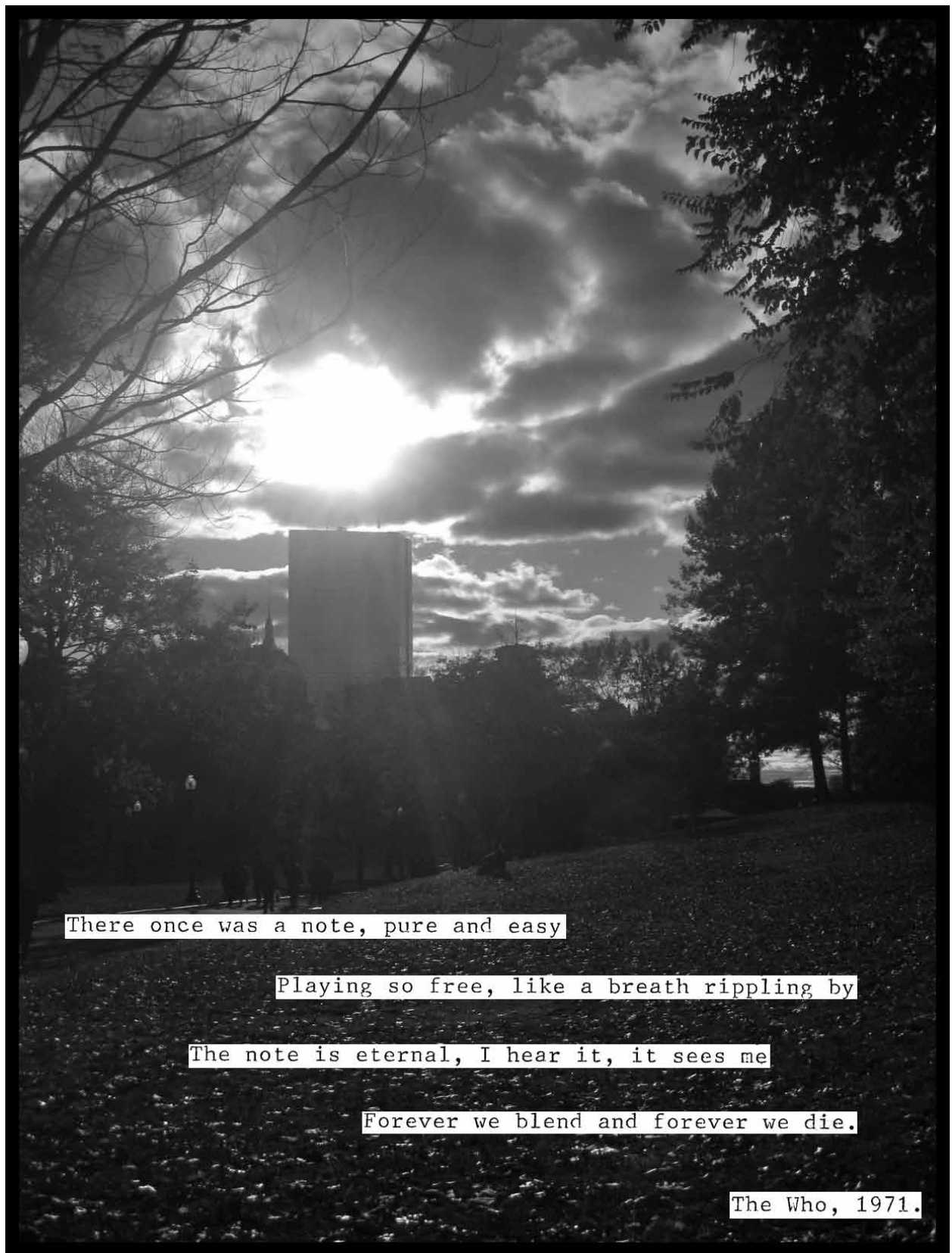


The Cenacle



NUMBER 83 | DECEMBER 2012



There once was a note, pure and easy

Playing so free, like a breath rippling by

The note is eternal, I hear it, it sees me

Forever we blend and forever we die.

The Who, 1971.

December 12, 2012
6:23 p.m.
Harvard Square
At Bonfain Cafe ^{Boyer-}corner
Cambridge, MA.

It's cold in Harvard Square tonight, crowded, near the holidays, so more lights, more anticipation, more tension, always a little extra something this time of year —

Times are maybe a little less tough than in awhile. The recent American elections turned out better than worse. The President is still a man who has some regard & respect, & some understanding & empathy for most of his fellow citizens. The man who challenged him was so utterly indifferent that watching him pretend to care was bizarre theater.

Marijuana is legal, for now, in Colorado & Washington State. The battle to "legalize" a medicinal & joy-causing plant goes well, for now. All comes down to who profits from it: the prisons or the governments of the states.



MASS MoCa Series #1

-48-

Someone will. Beautiful trend, though, no matter the greed for new taxes that will win the day eventually.

More gay men & women can marry "legally" now too. The cults that would shackle the society to their prejudices about human love are losing too. I sniff profits in this too but fine. Marry who you wish, light up a fat double to pass around in celebration.

Politics is the human business of governing & controlling a world that governs & controls itself by rules & mysteries humans little know. What other choice is there? Most of us are helpless to survive alone & get pretty much inept at living in unordered peace among fellow men & women.

Born biologically similar, it is nonetheless DNA, times, places, & randomness that quills one's path through the world. Politics herds, orders, names, categorizes. Controls, sort of. To legalize pot is to allow countless minds the chance at unfamiliar territory. To legalize gay marriage is similar, & of course it is true these territories



MASS MoCa Series #2

-49-

will be physical, as well. There should be no need to "legalize" a plant, or any kind of consensual sexual act or union, & yet there was, & it is occurring.

[new on Howard-to-Arlington #77 bus]

→ Looked at most optimistically, in the best spirit of this season, these acts of "legalization" are revealed as both acts of trust & of hope. Trust that legal pot & legal gay marriage will have good consequences for society as a whole. Hope that this will be so. Looked at this way, it's less important that taxes will be collected, profits made. Looked at this way, the idea of regulated trust begins to emerge. Laws that govern human activities, rather than forbid some of them. Govern. Regulate. Trust. Hope.

Ideal? Nah? I agree. But the strength of humans, as individuals, groups, as a race, roots as much in flaws, mistakes, as anything else. Handled no single & sure set of rules, varying geographies, DNA, there is no human-contrived single foundation

-50-

upon which to build. Just the incomplete & imperfect model of history. Just the enigmatic lessons & guidance of Nature & dreams.

Maybe, having invented the idea of years, we are simply celebrating having made it through another one. We had enough trust & hope to do so. Our wild & countless fears did not finally win out.

And now some of us, for now, can smoke the beautiful ganja. And some of our gay brothers & sisters can feel themselves closer to accepted by all.

I say: fuck yah. Alright. I'll take this much from 2012 &, being human, expect even more from 2013. Expect it, hope for it, trust it is possible. What else, what better way to live mortal lives is there?

☺ & ♥,



12/12/2012

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The Cenacle

NUMBER 83 | DECEMBER 2012

Edited by Raymond Souland Jr.

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WELCOME TO THE RODEO, COWBOY: MY FIRST JOURNEY WITH AYAHUASCA [ESSAY] by Jonathan TALAT Phillips	1
MANY MUSICS [POETRY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	7
NOTES FROM NEW ENGLAND [COMMENTARY] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	67
POETRY by Judih Haggai	71
CLASSIC POETRY by Jelalludin Rumi	77
GATEWAY TO MEXICO [TRAVEL JOURNAL] by Nathan D. Horowitz	81
POETRY by Joe Coleman	95
POETRY by Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor	99
HUSTLE-WORK STORIES [ESSAY] by Charlie Beyer	105
POETRY by Tom Sheehan	111
POETRY by Martina Newberry	117
LABYRINTHINE [A NEW FICTION] by Raymond Souland, Jr. [🌀]	121
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS	161

SCRIPTOR PRESS



NEW ENGLAND

2012

Front and back cover art by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard. Original *Cenacle* logo by Barbara Brannon. Interior art by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Soulard. For more information about exhibitions at MASS MoCa, visit <http://www.massmoca.org>.

Accompanying disk to print version contains:

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- Burning Man Books #1-66
- *Scriptor Press Sampler* #1-13
- *RaiBooks* #1-7
- RS Mixes from “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution”; &
- Jellicle Literary Guild Highlights Series

Disk contents downloadable at: http://www.scriptorpress.com/cenacle/supplementary_disk.zip

The Cenacle is published quarterly (with occasional special issues) by Scriptor Press New England, 2442 NW Market Street, #363, Seattle, Washington, 98107. It is kin organ to ElectroLounge website (<http://www.scriptorpress.com>), RaiBooks, Burning Man Books, Scriptor Press Sampler, The Jellicle Literary Guild, & “Within’s Within: Scenes from the Psychedelic Revolution w/Soulard,” broadcast online worldwide weekends on SpiritPlants Radio (<http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>). All rights of works published herein belong exclusively to the creator of the work. Email comments to: editor@scriptorpress.com

Thank you to the American electorate, as a whole, for re-electing Barack Obama as President; & in particular, on the one hand, to Colorado & Washington State for legalizing marijuana; & on the other, to Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, & again Washington State for passing measures defending the rights of gay people to marry. And, lastly, to our own beloved state of Massachusetts for continuing to catch up, by legalizing medical marijuana at last!





Welcome to the Rodeo, Cowboy: My First Journey with Ayahuasca

[Essay]

Excerpt from The Electric Jesus: The Healing Journey of a Contemporary Gnostic, 2011.

We pulled into a gravel driveway a mile outside of town. Three other cars stood in front of a small, deteriorating farmhouse that featured the same flaking white paint and sinking front porch as the humidity-wrecked houses from my parents' economically depressed homeland in north central Missouri. This would be like tripping at my grandparents' house. Dark clouds had rolled in from the west and the brown hills around us looked sad and ominous.

Nick, our "aya-guide" for the journey, stepped out of a two-story chicken coop behind the house. Trained as an ethnobotanist among tribes in the Amazon, Nick's style sported an eclectic fashion ecosystem—Peruvian poncho, Shipibo embroidered hat, Asháninka red-and-white beaded necklaces, and Gap khaki pants.

A mutual friend introduced us a month earlier at a Williamsburg loft party. When I asked Nick how he started guiding psychedelic journeys, he told me in a friendly, nasally voice that in Peru the vine told him to learn how to brew ayahuasca and share it with people in the States for healing. "Really?" I nodded politely. "The vine told you this?" He said it was the most powerful medicinal plant he had ever encountered, and this was his profession. Still, I wasn't sure I wanted to embark on a journey with a skinny pseudo-shaman who looked barely thirty. He may have known about the medicinal benefits of dandelions and lyre leaf sage, and could even survive a food stoppage in New York City, having lived off edible plants in Central Park for a week, but I didn't trust that any of those experiences could match those of the several-hundred-years lineage holders of the Secoya and Conibo tribes.

But I had been curious about the effects of ayahuasca since reading Dr. Rick Strassman's *DMT: The Spirit Molecule*. In the book, Strassman offers the poetic hypothesis that DMT—which is endogenous to the human body as well as countless plants and other animals—is produced by the pineal gland. Shaped like a pinecone and named from the Latin word *pineus*, which means "relating to pine," this tiny gland, weighing .1 grams, sits right in the position of the third eye—or, if you prefer, the sixth chakra, at the top of the body's Tree of Life. It would be fitting for this mysterious gland to secrete a substance that triggers the most electric mystical experiences.

Nick helped carry our bags up a wooden ladder to the second floor of the chicken coop. Inside, five New York City Burners with Mexican blankets draped over their shoulders were preparing the space with ornamental rugs and wild flowers. They lit incense and sprayed sweet-smelling oils in the air.

"It's kind of quaint," I said hopefully. But all of their efforts couldn't hide the wire windows, busted-up floorboards, and the musty smell of rotting wood.

"It looks like a horror movie," Mitchell replied robotically. A swarm of angry butterflies raged through my abdomen as I pictured a long afternoon trapped in the grotesque psychedelic chambers of my mind.

Nick whistled for us to sit in a circle. He played songs on a qanbūs, the short-necked lute/guitar from Yemen, then whispered Shipibo healing prayers over the plastic Canada Dry bottle holding the ayahuasca. "If you get into any jams, I have wild chili pepper to bring you back." He poured the murky brown liquid in a ceramic cup and handed it to Tavis. When it was my turn, I asked "the vine of souls" to help me with my next clue in uncovering the secrets of the Tree of Life, and how that might help heal our world in crisis.

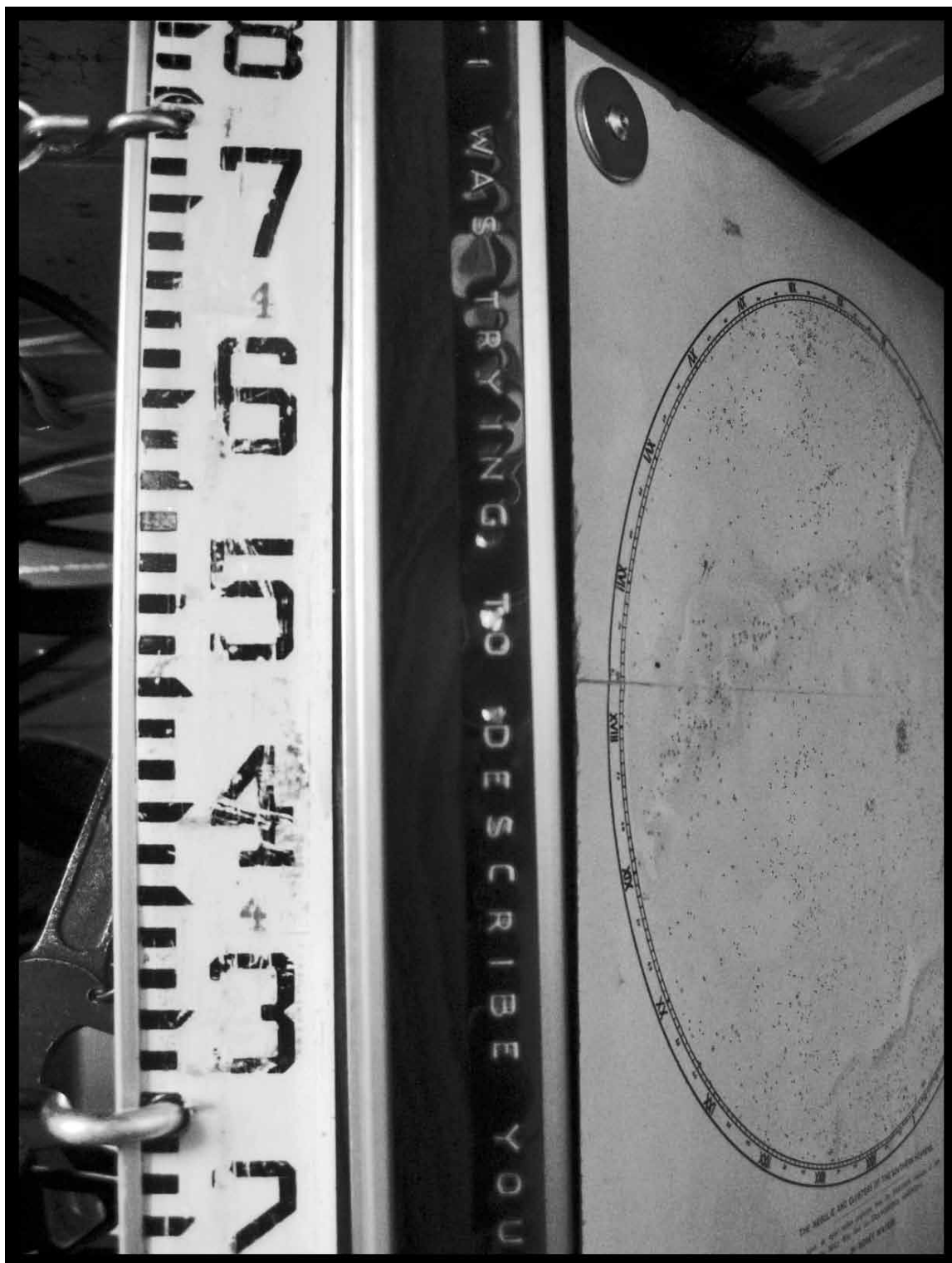
I cringed while swallowing the viscous substance, which tasted like an unsavory mixture of coffee, green tea, and dirt. We sat quietly for forty-five minutes until I noticed the weathered ceiling boards slither and bend, curling into immaculate designs. The battered wood wove into a beautiful alien language that I somehow recognized. The characters looked like Celtic rune merged with binary code. I felt as if I were about to "remember" their meaning when the paint flakes on the wood brightened and blossomed into elaborate beige and cream-colored doilies, which suddenly bulged forward, descending towards me.

"Just kick back and relax," I heard a presence tell me. I immediately recognized it as the same voice that had appeared in my room the night I started seeing energy fields. "Cowboy, you're in for a fun ride." This time the apparition had a sense of humor, calling me "cowboy," but I didn't find it funny. I immediately sat up, sipping up short, panicked breaths. I had dabbled with mushrooms and LSD before, but even with the hallucinations, I knew my experiences were a projection of my own mind. This time, just as in the online ayahuasca trip reports, another entity (or at least that's what I presumed it to be), was telling me to chill out. Could I trust this being? Where did it come from? What did it look like? Why was it hiding behind these lattice designs and why did it follow me around? Maybe this was a helpful spirit or perhaps I was crazy and hearing voices that weren't really there? Whatever it was, I wasn't sure if I wanted it around.

Placing my palms carefully on the wood floor, I slowly lowered my body back to the ground. The fanciful doilies in the ceiling blossomed out like flowers, and wove and danced down towards me. I felt them lock into small vortexes of energy, which I presumed to be the major chakras, running along the middle of my body. I had never encountered the chakras physically before, but in this heightened state of awareness, they weren't just mysterious subtle centers, but powerful pneumatic motors that raised my body's vibration as the lattice-designs spun them faster and faster. Tears trembled into my eyes with the acceleration. My organs, bones, and skin grew oppressively heavy, crushing in on themselves and squeezing out the air in my lungs. "Oh, my god," I thought, "I'm dying." With a sudden flash of light, the pressure released and my energy consciousness shot out of my scalp, blasting through an undulating veil of colorful fractal patterns until I found my spirit, if that's what you would call it, swimming in a serene velvety black void. A school of globular white lights swam up to me like dolphins, blinking on and off as if they were saying, "Welcome home."

Floating bodiless in this peaceful void, I recalled a line from *The Jesus Mysteries* by Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, that the Gnostics were "psychonauts who boldly explored the final frontiers of inner space, and the origins and meaning of life." Was it possible that the Amazonian vine would reveal to me traces of the ancient Christian mysteries?

As I harbored this thought, a full-size movie screen suddenly unfurled from within the



MASS MoCa Series #3

dark nothingness. Scenes of my life projected in super-sonic speed onto its white surface—moving to the mountains from the suburbs at the age of two; my father losing his job; hiding in the basement from my mother’s shouts; receiving my high school diploma; holding keg stand competitions in college; fumbling sex with my first girlfriend; healing my throat in Prague; and screaming “The Republicans are coming!” down Lexington Avenue in my Jonny America outfit.

After all of these images, the screen showed me a young pregnant woman, maybe sixteen or seventeen years old, being tortured in a dungeon or bunker with dirt walls. I tried to make sense of the image, and how it pertained to me. The presence whispered through the void: “Cowboy, that was you, a long time ago. You’ve carried the sorrow and anger from that trauma throughout many lifetimes.”

“Reincarnation?” I asked to the strange voice, confused. I hadn’t thought much of past lives, nor of people who believed in them.

“You chose to be born to your mother in this incarnation to relive this terror,” the voice said. “You’re learning to transmute and overcome those energies. So get this straight, okay, your mother is your guide. You got it, cowboy.”

Before I had time to digest this bombshell, my consciousness swished back into my body, but I wasn’t exactly me. I saw myself as a majestic bear-human on a stone throne, a wild but graceful animal with a human continence. “This represents the story of tribal humanity,” the voice advised. That image soon disappeared to reveal a half-human, half-lion on a gilded throne, similarly animal but more regal. Around me embroidered red-and-silver tapestries hung on the walls of a vast palace chamber. Millions of other half-lion royals appeared with golden branches stretching out of their glowing crowns, connecting us in a gilded web. “This represents the story of civilization, humanity’s journey out of nature into separation, laws, and technological achievement.”

Experiencing this vision had a profoundly calming effect on me. I shed some of the negative judgments I held regarding humankind’s leap out of Eden, and the violence and cruelty that entailed. Perhaps it was all a transitional phase, a necessary second act that will lead to a transcendent third one. As this idea occurred to me, from behind my thrown, two golden eagles with eight-foot wingspans rose up, circling higher and higher in the air until they broke through the ceiling. Then the room crashed into rubble.

Out of the dust I saw a snake-human arise on an invisible throne. It had normal yellow eyes and a slow flickering red tongue, but its scales boasted a complicated diamond pattern that looked futuristically alien and synthetic. Powerful white light emanated from every pore of this creature. His gaze struck me as sophisticated, telepathic, full of Buddha-like compassion. This snake was the coming together of nature and technology after a 10,000-year schism, an enlightened non-dualistic synthesis.

“Cowboy, this represents where you humans are evolving,” the presence announced, “toward something beyond your wildest three-dimensional imaginations, yet you already know this and hold the seed within each of you. It’s already happening, so get ready for some fun. The party is just getting started,” the presence giggled almost ominously. The snake sucked in his tongue and winked at me.

With that final gesture, I disappeared into a swirling *Doctor Who*-like wormhole, racing through a tunnel of kaleidoscopic colors until the presence told me: “Open Sesame.” It took me a minute to register my coordinates when opening my eyes. I was sitting on an oriental rug

in a dilapidated chicken coop. An ordinary American white male. Everyone else was nestled quietly under their Mexican blankets, off on their journeys. Nick waved a stick of incense in the air, whistling along to birdcalls he had recorded in the Amazon, which played on a pair of portable speakers.

The presence was not yet gone. It asked me to lie down, which I did, and close my eyes. It then began to zap healing light into my anxiety-ridden abdomen. Painful memories surfaced as the light opened knots of trapped energy in the depths of my intestines. There was my mother screaming, “We’re going to the poor house”; my brother punching my stomach while holding me down to the floor; me drinking myself to oblivion at Denver’s Lion’s Lair; and me again standing on the railing of Prague’s Charles Bridge, considering ending it all. The white light dissolved the pain of these traumas.

I meditated on how these experiences could have mirrored the victimization of a tortured woman, who might have been me, many lifetimes ago. I saw a possible link between the woman’s suffering and the melancholy I felt as a kid, brooding over blue snow-capped Mount Evans at dusk, yearning for something I had long lost. Perhaps the root of my suffering went beyond an unpleasant childhood, to a spiritual source unperceivable to educated psychologists.

As the white-light surgery reached a sharp pain under my belly button, a medieval portrait of Jade and me flashed before my eyelids. We each wore long red robes, broaches around our necks, gold crowns with crosses sticking out the top, and held jeweled scepters in our hands.

“Jade is your queen,” the presence informed me. “You have karma together, so stick this one out, okay? No more playing the field, at least for a while.”

“You’re kidding!” I yelled back at the voice. Somehow, I was able to take all the animal royalty, the energy healing, and a past life as a tortured woman, in stride. But this was going too far. Jade as my *queen*? I had grown up with a fiery-tempered woman and my tolerance for it only went so far, no matter what some uppity presence had to say about it.

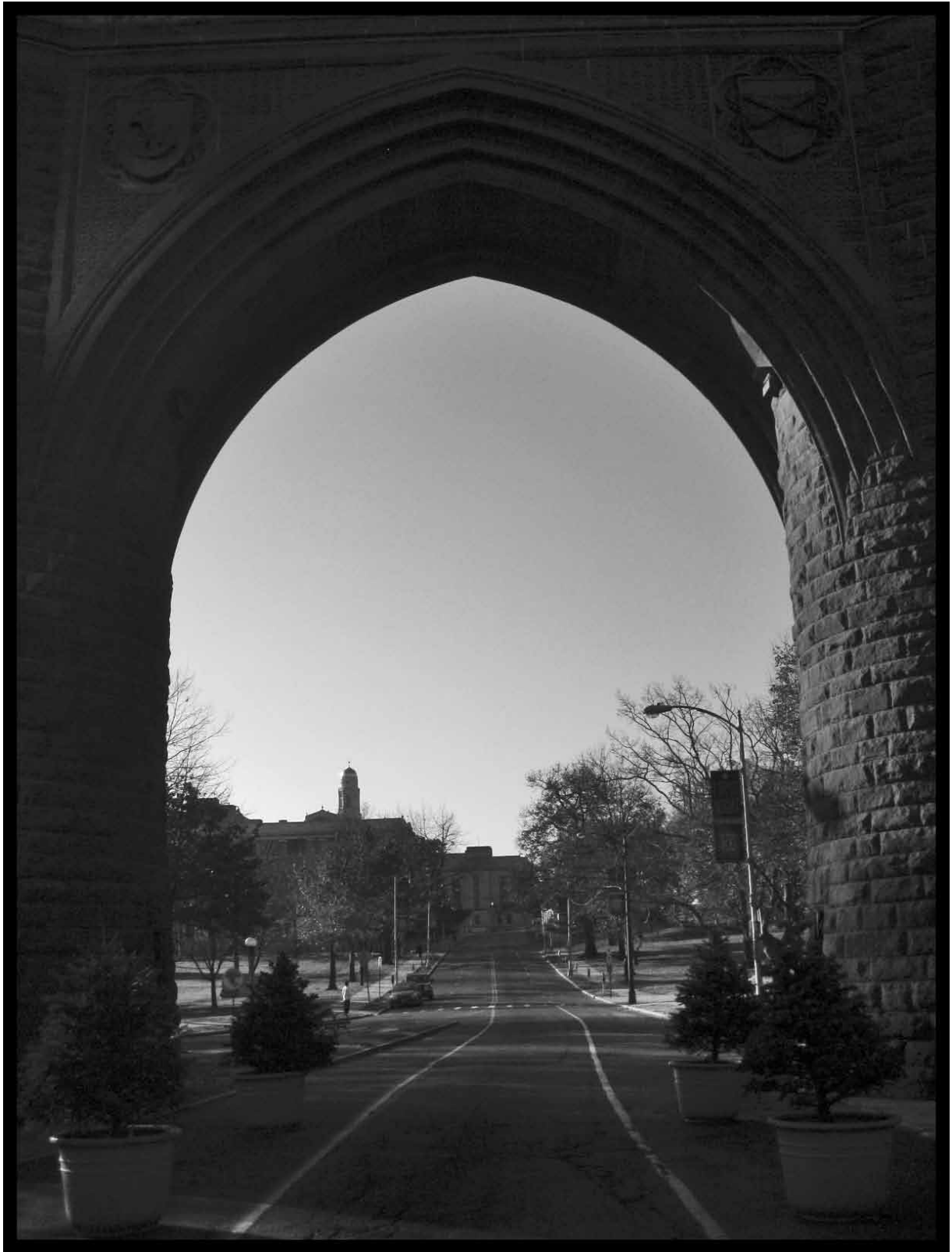
“Just consider it,” the voice said, then continued the light surgery for the rest of the afternoon.

The effects of the ayahuasca faded by nightfall. Sitting at a long wooden table in the farmhouse kitchen, we nourished our bodies with Nick’s vegetarian version of feijoada, Brazilian bean soup. While eating, my fellow journeyers shared the communications they had encountered with the plant.

“I asked the vine, ‘This is just me talking back to myself, right?’” Mitchell recounted. “And it answered, ‘Sure, if that makes it easier on you.’” A woman, who was still wearing a Mexican blanket over her shoulders, said, “I was told we need to rush to save creation on this planet. There’s not much time left.”

“The vine said we need to stop fighting the old systems and start creating new containers for people who are going through these spiritual openings,” Tavis reflected. “Together, we need to build something that’s never existed before—a global network of light.”

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Many Musics

Eighth Series

*When did it matter most?
When I smiled at another & believed.*

The Tangled Gate *for JBIII*

She Returns to the Island

Remember some things. It's what put me
in this small boat on this great
blood-remembering sea in this melancholic
month of the year, near too cold to sail.
I've left the Pensionne as though not to return,
but look at that blue bag. That's all.

Remember some things. And what choice?
You neared me in my dreams, nearer than
any man had, at least meaningfully.
You neared, you lured, you made off.
"The Tangled Gate. Find me through the
Tangled Gate. Will you choose? Will you?"

It is hard sailing to get to the Island.
This boat won't get me there, I can't make
my friend risk his livelihood. I'll swim,
despite his looks, his friend's wish
to protect me somehow. The Pensionne had
recovered him too. But I am prepared.

I'll swim. I haven't in years, in the sea,
but it's like I'm more fish than girl.
My bag is sealed, hauls from my waist,
I wave a thank you at him in mid-flight
to the water. These blood-remembering
waters took too much from me to ask more.

So I thought. Architect, I thought you &
 your prick-addled son both swallowed in
 its deep. I thought I lost you to worse
 than your uncertainty, your willingness
 to take me only with your eyes. No,
 it seems. You survived, you live, so say my dreams.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-
 collapse breathless. The sea lets me leave
 but slow, as though something more,
 something else. The grey-etched skies, too,
 prod me restless, go. Return. Remember some things,
 something's ticking harder, little to do with time.

She Remembers the Queen

Working my way along the rocks
 I remember the Queen, my father's
 jealous wife, with her herbs for fidelity
 & her witchly cult's screeching songs on
 full moon nights. Was this sparkling foamy
 beach where my own path began to begin?

The story was foolish but nobody would say
 otherwise. The King & his reckless plays with
 the Eternals, gamblings with one & another
 for bits of power. Agrees to slay the magical
 white bull in tribute, then switches out
 another. Fool an eternal? Some don't learn.

Fool an eternal? Feel an enraged fist. Now
 see the mesmerized Queen sneaking off by night,
 rouged & primped, a servant carrying her
 sex box. I followed by shadow, I watched,
 the crashing waters, the bull's wet roar,
 the beguiled woman's ass fit high for cracking.

Now gorged with her punishment, now
 unseen for weeks, she called me to her
 rooms, she touched my hair, my new breasts,
 lied & called me beloved daughter.
 I waited at the very edge of her bed, ticking,
 naming & counting constellations in my mind.

"Don't lead with your heart, child,
it will betray you," she growled.
"How did you cause this? What was your
wrong?" She smiled, a woman handsome
like a man. "When they near you, child,
hooked by your luring blood, do what I didn't."

Silence. Ticking. Counting. "Sniff." "Sniff?"
Silence again. Breathing more complex than
it ought. I should have felt something, or
at least these years later. I remember the advice,
& think only the stupid woman learned one thing to say.
I remember her dragging her sex box home before light.

She Visits the Dancing Grounds

Eventually to climb, the Castle on its tall hill,
my father the King & his spy-glass to the seas,
his insomniac patrols in the weaker hours of the night.
He'd say, when I was small, "They're all out there."
Always looking high, in love with night's shiny stones,
the musical patterns of gulls in flight, sleepless too, I'd ask: "Who?"

"Where we come from, the ones who would take all
this. Our heritage & home." I looked hard toward
the star-speckled horizon, seeing the dark waves only
in my mind. Answered his fears with my only powers,
touch & kiss & the breath of few words. Embraced,
sighing, he'd say: "There are other weapons, stranger strengths."

I come now to what he built me later, a remain
of those years. He knew I moved quick like
my white bunny, & light like my many butterflies,
& said I must dance. Showed me books with patterns
he'd kept as he kept little else. Stranger strengths.
We'd study. I'd imitate. He shook his head. I'd try again.

The grounds for the dance'd be raked every evening,
the stones set in place. I'd come before eating.
Some water, a gown, but me nude. Alone, all quiet,
I'd let the waking dream come, move my feet,
shift my body to sing its pictures & noise.
Only companion the morning's movement into light.



The rocks would stray from my feet, the raked
 sands scatter. By when the others joined,
 the grounds would compose my song & message.
 They would smile, pretty & clothed, I would let them.
 Not my friends, just other pretty trinkets of the court.
 My father the King liked the contrast. Had his choice.

Only one understood, knew as we did.
 Friend sister rival, she smiled & danced for noone.
 You built these grounds, now savaged by kind time
 & human neglect, & let me lure you a true love
 by the collision of the magic in my dawn's
 erupted dream & the girl who knew no patterns in the stones.

She Visits the Castle

When last I saw you, brother, you were in
 this doorway, on your way to the games,
 convinced in that sweet, soft, thorough way
 of yours that you'd win. The pretty trinkets
 of the court admired your shoulders & thighs.
 I worried as always about your limp.

It happened when you were young & sick,
 & I don't know how, but thereafter you grew
 quickly, so graceful, & slightly off. You treated me
 tender, indulged me brush your hair, sometimes
 carry your bag to the sports fields. You excelled.
 The limp came & went, an obsession of some seasons.

You mentioned my dreams that last time
 all of us gathered here. The Queen tightly
 crated in her several best colors, new haughty scraps.
 The King my father with the sweet demon's glint
 in his eyes, her spread sleeping in a private chamber.
 Even the Architect, who saw the limp too.

"Will you tell them all goodbye for me?"
 you whispered as we embraced. No louder
 than a breathy thought. I nodded. I knew
 I wouldn't see you again by daylight, though
 I wondered about other hours. It was the last time
 we all stood together. You sprinted alone to the boats.

The Castle is returning to field, perhaps even
 forest one day, the one which covered most of
 this Island long ago. Many stones fallen,
 rooms collapsed, I climb stairs half-gone
 & think: this is truer life than all those
 anniversaries of the Crown & its stolen secrets.

Finally, to my room, at least the chamber
 that held it. There's little of me here,
 even less than ago. I lay out my bed roll,
 my brush, my totems, my knife. I'll sleep,
 finally, but likely not dream. The place in the wall,
 its tunnels, its caves, won't open again, no matter my tears.

She Passes by The Tangled Gate

A few steps at dawn on the dancing grounds, just a few
 for now, to see how it feels. Strange is a meager word.
 My blue bag is waiting, & the next place to see.
 Places, really. What remains of the Tangled Gate
 now, the one in my sweetest of childly dreams, &
 the one you, Architect, would not let me pass.

Find you in there? Time's hand has been no less kind,
 human neglect again her partner. Just a few steps in,
 the great Fountain that greets all, insists a drink,
 looks half-swiped down by the years. Not just a drink
 but a decision: left or right? A crux to distinct
 paths, each a phantom hand, reaching, encouraging.

And yet the Gate itself is not fallen, little rusted,
 a stubborn collaborator in the matter of its passage.
 And its small legend still clear, a lily's glow:
 "For those lost." I read it, & read it again,
 as though my pout or my wink or what mind
 I've gathered to me could loose its first riddle.

For those lost. Someone read those words
 to me the first time I saw them. In my chamber
 through the hole in the wall in my dreams,
 yes, it was strange. Yes, I was small. Yes,
 it was real like important & beautiful things
 in this world are real. Yes, this belief wears
 & wearies in my mind. Yes, it's why I've returned.

And yes, to find you through the Tangled Gate,
 Architect. For minutes & then more of them
 I stand here stupid with griefs, where
 I come from, far from home. I try to remember,
 claw into my heart for its old wounds & stars.
 The cold sky bends me lower, & I let. I release.

I remember one thing, small, but a place
 to put my steps. Deep in the Tangled Gate,
 we faced a cave, a featureless maw,
 the Beast just two more roars & a crash
 away. My friend smiled, took my hand, said to me:
 "No way out but through," & we went. *We went.*

She Sees the Tower, Again Trebles in Time

Was the King my father who first brought me
 here, to meet the Architect, see his chambers.
 I felt tree, I saw Tower, I dreamed star craft.
 Are there still rooms along those impossible stairs?
 Are the faces in the stones still clear, some crying out
 yet some smiling? Some not men at all.

They set me on a stool before a spyglass too heavy
 for me to move. That day I saw what I'd see
 again in dreams, the innards of the Tangled Gate,
 its branching roots, its shadowed-out mysteries.
 And movement in there? I looked & looked,
 not yet knowing what thing this was.

A noise behind me in these half-lit chambers,
 I turn. A branch pokes up through the roof,
 behold a patch of speeding stars. I open my mouth
 but another cries out. The King my father
 is angry, waving off the Architect & his plea.
 They are long words, somehow clung to bark & earth.

We leave, I am roughly carried, the stairs
 pass more like dropping straight into water.
 I do not return for years, am told not to,
 not just by the King my father who forbids
 me nothing otherwise. Those I love in
 the caves & tunnels behind my chamber wall:

They say I treble in time. See was, is, &
 to-be at once. Our last banquet, every kind
 present to honor my birthday. I talk of the Tower,
 of other dreams than these with them.
 Hundreds of noses raise & sniff. Silence.
 I've decided. Or maybe my new woman's blood has.

They forbid me return, my love for them
 their only power to protect me. I shake
 my head, I go. Fear all of this for days
 until I am standing again in this place,
 looking up. I will move your spy glass now, Architect.
 I'm ready to ascend your tree, your Tower, your star craft.

The Architect Remembers the Boy

They say the boy's waxy wings melted &
 betrayed him when he too neared the sun.
 They say the boy was my son. They say
 the boy was an ordinary boy. They say
 The Tangled Gate is just a maze-prison
 with a hungry Beast-bastard within.

He was hungry when I found him, terrified
 of me, neither Beast nor boy. I fed him
 from my bag, he calmed, he studied its color,
 the sky's, though I thought him half-blind.
 We talked by touch & I learned it was not
 The Tangled Gate which he feared, but the voices.

They spoke in words but he received them
 as clicks & noises he could not run from.
 We listened together, & he understood,
 & he smiled. Yes. They had brought me to him
 & now we would leave. Eventually, for him,
 the Island itself too. This wasn't his home.

The voices led us from the Gate &
 I taught him the human tongue. He lived
 with me in the Tower, & I schooled him,
 though not in the dull samely histories of
 men's wars & gods. I taught him how to let
 & release to those voices. Steer through many worlds.

And other ways to reach The Tangled Gate.
 A day too soon & it was time for us to go there
 again. The King prepared to take the mainland,
 & he commanded every boy & man clapped in steel.
 Though this boy could have fought & ended the war
 for either side himself, we left before dawn.

We flew together many places that day,
 I showed him the beautiful world of trees,
 & mountains, the many seas, even the works
 of men. Many pointed, later made statues
 & songs. When the sun approached its fiercest hour,
 I signaled to him to rise & to rise.

There were feathers & waxy drops all around me
 for a moment. He touched my mind & said goodbye.
 I dreamed for years of his final plunge,
 perfect sexless body. All I had taught him,
 what he would learn. They say this boy was my son.
 But men still clap for war, & say many foolish things.

The Architect Watches from His Tower

It's really true men once grew from
 spasm & spit, from the awkward twist
 of torsos, the fevered collide of breast
 & pelvis, suddenly the prick a catalytic
 bomb, suddenly the cunt to which sought
 & resisted & sought for its planting ground.

How did we finally stop? Was it the wisdom
 desperation contrives with a conceding cry?
 I don't know, nor why I am here among
 these men. Negotiating for other outcomes.
 I was sent to serve a King whose lusts
 are boring & easily filled. A bed & a torso.

Where she comes from, suddenly, I am aware.
 She is no daughter of this King. Her dreams
 are not dreams by any reckoning. Brought
 to the Island, kept to her chambers,
 her singing to rags & flower vases, she finds
 the Gate immediately. She enters.

Night after night, I watch her dreams
 from my chamber, watch her enter
 the Gate deeper & deeper, no maps,
 not the tools I have for its feistier,
 slipperier places. She makes within &
 the Gate responds, smooths & opens to her.

I don't intend for her to meet me but
 when her brother's dead body is returned,
 we honor him as one. Though I alone
 know the boy's intent was not victory
 in games but peace making, I put on
 my robes, share the chants & the ground breaking.

She spies me from among her grieving parents.
 We exchange nothing, no nod, no smile,
 but thereafter I haunt her Gate wanderings.
 Like I was the answer to a question
 she didn't have, & now it consumes us both.
 Across stars & centuries we will ask this question.

The Architect in Exile

I wake up in a dank tent to the noise
 of departure. Recognized, not knowing
 even my name, I nod inly & begin
 to assemble my facts. We'd lost the last
 key battle, & are going. Our enemies
 are blood-close, the worst kind, but
 are allowing us a war-less path to exile.

There are several hundred of us, though
 there'd been many more. They are grim
 but strangely not hardy. They are leaving
 because the army is gone. Like a pretty head
 with no body, unable to compensate, to be other
 than a pretty head. The King makes them hurry.

When I enter his tent, he starts, wonders
 why I am not gone to the Island.
 My new life solidifies in that space,
 I am here to survey & ready our new home.
 I pack my bag, full of tools from a nameless
 future, & arrive before nightfall.

When I see the Gate, I nod, unhappy.
 The time beyond time is crumbling back
 through these centuries, it makes no sense,
 but here I am again, here is the Gate,
 I am trudging through summer mud
 toward what I know I will find.

In myths, the Tower is portrayed as
 my prison, where the King kept me
 in punishment & service. This is a hole
 in the story, & the truth is absent
 within its absence. It is no prison
 but my home in every place & time.

I do not serve the King but he wants something
 from me. I am his necromancer &
 he believes the Gate will prove his
 best weapon. This greed gives me time
 while I contrive a way to fuse the cracks.
 I am tired of tools & travel. I wish
 only for my tree revealed, a day & a night
 without end. She will help me find
 what I need. She will inherit my tools
 as reward & join me in the Gate.

The Architect is Her Teacher, Her Hummingbird

I first appear to you in the Gate as an invitation
 to believe. Your dreams of this place are still new,
 a game you half-remember by morning, seeing
 as you have been trained to see, that there is no hole
 in your chamber's wall. I invite you to accept two truths
 about one thing. There isn't a hole. There is.

You have a picture book, a simple telling
 of the hummingbird story, he who gave men
 music & taught them to sing. You breathe this book
 through many days, memorize its few words
 & many strange pictures. I see my chance
 to twine with your path, & softly take it.



One spring day you return to your paints &
 large sheets to find the hummingbird on
 your page gone, as though never made.
 Waking next morning you discover it flitting
 upon your chamber wall, as though always.
 In later days, moved again, the Queen's half-wild garden.

You ask the King your father but his smile above
 his maps is mirthless, a thing of abstract love.
 You even ask your friends behind the wall
 but they do not know what a hummingbird is.
 Strangely, they do not care to try. As a child,
 you nearly leave this strange mystery quickly as it came.

I let you but one. You are walking the path
 in the Tangled Gate to the place you call
 the Carnival Room. You are singing the hummingbird's
 song, about how one day mankind will remember
 its first song again, & fly away. As you make
 the last turn, I appear before you, set upon the air.

You gasp. You look. I am my question to you.
 This is your test. You hold out your finger to me,
 half-smiling. I accept & you walk along, no words,
 just the potent of touch. As we both wake,
 I am humming for you, & then we share this too.
 My bedchamber is as dark as yours is plush
 with light. We each nod, & know. You now twice believe.

The Architect's Record of the Time Beyond Time

You found, you read: “The storms became constant, wordlessly violent; the daily life of men & markets, ideologies competing mostly benignly, churches vaguely explaining their fences & roofs to the cattle within, new seers smiling with fresh ancient visions of humanity waking & rising as one, was over.

“What remained for most was the leash & a stingy bowl at nightfall. Hope was a little more light in the day’s grey sky, less snagging wind at night. Where possibility still lay, at least for a few, was far below ground, in the great darkened halls of the sleepers, thousands of them clicking song, fed by tubes & awake less than an hour a day.

“The men of science, magick, & spirit had joined with the men of Art to contrive a solution. What remained unfouled of the seas & mountains & forests had been blended into this work, not to save the world but undo it, find the place beyond the Dreaming, by scavenging through history for the clue all believed was there, the thread out of time.

“If this all sounds lunatic, or a beautiful plan but far too late, or you dubious wonder that such diverse men were able to work together even at the end, you are right, you have read well. The minds of men did not contrive this plan, but others whose own world had been lost. They had tried & failed to convince, to help, for centuries, & it wasn’t working now. More sleepers would wake up dead, or simply disappear.”

What you did not read is what I did not write in those pages. I came back not intending to return. You are the thread. You are the clue. The Tangled Gate will seal the world, close its cracks, & those back then will not live nor die. My Tower has snapped the link back to them. You are the chance I follow.

The Architect Sees Her, & Again

At first we dreamers traveled history like shadows.
 There were few of us, drinking the foul potions
 to cross beyond the Dreaming.
 We scattered through times & lands,
 & returned to report the details.
 What we found was morass, not pattern.

The lives of men are governed as much by chance
 as will. By blood's strange inheritance,
 & the way desires will twist & deepen & half-rabid
 survive the years, by shell after shell.
 Wars were fought over land, women, cankerous
 want for power & control in a world that
 buries or blows to breeze every large man &
 his castle, every pauvre & his cup, every God-thing
 & its statues & its followers & its very name.

More of us joined the first few sleepers,
 & the chemicals got stronger. We slept more hours
 of the day, surrendered lives & loves for this obsession.
 We began to invade & maul history, but nothing above improved.
 Powerful men built grander edifices over dead soil,
 ranged greater seas of armies against each other,
 queered mortal desperation into frenzied faiths.
 We below were forgotten. Didn't matter.

This is why I've chosen not to return,
 to meet you at the Fountain near the entrance
 to the Tangled Gate. I see you approach
 & keep my cover until you enter. You still carry
 the blue bag I gave you. You never change
 through the centuries. I still shudder as
 you hesitate, kick the golden leaves at your feet.
 Your breathing quicks, mine does too, & you enter.

The Queen & Her Beast

There are forces in this world no man taps,
 no man harnesses, no man controls.
 Yet mankind, a living thing, roots from these
 forces, the plays & persecutions of its history
 bides within their grasp, & though invitations
 to study their roots, grasp their trunks,
 set lightly upon their leaves to read the pages
 better, are offered to each & all, few wake
 from these, bray wildly for this more satisfying
 food, & make for the boundaries.

I watched the young Queen often. Stolen like a treasure,
 by agreement, from her kin's palace in the sun,
 married off to the King to maintain a peaceful war,
 she moved quietly within the halls of his anguish
 for his dead wife. Unnoticed that she imported
 her seers & witchly craftswomen from back home,
 & these piddlers in magickal currents that
 hardly knew them extant aided her to mesmer
 the royal bed, conjure in his eyes, to his touch,
 the dead woman's lips & breasts, fingers & hips.

I watched her as she came night after night
 to the beach, to hidden spy the chained cows
 cry in fear & hunger for their starry fields,
 instead lures for powers from the seas,
 victims of men's belief that blood's only choice
 is spending or spilling.

When I galloped from the waves, I snapped
 the links & bid them away. She trembled
 too, but did not move. I approached her, huffing
 & snarling. Reached in, crumpled her mask,
 calmed her down deep. I showed her unfurled
 power that night, sang for her scraps of
 the first songs, drew her beat & breath
 far from that nocturnal beach, its celestial
 foolishness above, speckled riddles to mock
 those wide-eyed with arrogance.

We crafted a pact, a new truth that would
 birth me into her world. She agreed to the lie
 that we mated, & an unholy thing emerged,
 a shame to be caged, & slaved to new
 bloodspill. She even commanded her tinker
 build her a sex-box to receive me. In return,
 as we twined, I lit her every cavern with knowing,
 loosened men's harness upon her heart,
 revealed its better stars, its fenceless limits.

The One Woods & Its Beast

There is a maw to the heart of the world
 & from it I emerge. But you will find it
 everywhere there is a far edge, a man,
 an idea, a shattering storm. The world
 is no more still than any of its creatures,
 its music the transformation none will resist.

This morning is peaceful, I stay near
 my best-known oaks. I think about where
 I've been, where I am now, I am nearing,
 I am trembling to quiet. Later there is feeding
 all around me, a sharper-tongued wind,
 the beautiful violence of mating. Far edges.

Close my eyes & I am the near-blind man,
 my remaining sight still fluttering with
 lilac & lily, moving with their scented light,
 scratching up a spark by glint & petal,
 behold my colored silhouettes shaped like a God-thing.

Open my eyes & I am the scrawny prick-hard
 singer, finding my music beneath the night's
 sweeping skirts, insisting the oldest idols
 totter forward & people my lyrics,
 grind bloodless hips new with the next hour's
 unspent semen, its high crackling juice.

Close again & now the tall professor, behold
 my sepia-washed pictures, their hard press
 at your jaw & shoulders to justify now
 your own sanity, resist this years-long game—

Again & now the dark man kneeling
 with my horn & shredding time—

The tides, the quakes, the rosebuds in
her cheeks signaling blushing new love
or how her sickness consumes—

I am quiet this morning near my oaks,
near the beating, breathing maw & yet—

I would warn you from the far edges inly
& others bitter far, but hope you do not listen,
grow your berries over the cliff, move your herd
before the snows intercede, drink that potion
& watch your fingers make the world glow—

I would warn you find the far edges or
bray through your bars away, grasp them
harder, love them better—little wonder what
happens to those who cry out—& climb through—

I would say nothing & let you be as I am
merely servant to the world, my task not
to preach but to rankle, stir the world's power
elsewise, give history an uncertain path,
so no way to grasp what's occurring,
& no way to know how it ends.

World's Wish & Its Beast

There've been times, moments, places
I've relaxed, & begun to believe. Winter lights
on a long boulevard, a hidden shade of
cool salmon over low hills. Even battlefields,
yes, on moonless nights. Close to the dying,
or dying myself again.

In memories I find it & would show it all
around if I could. We danced that courtyard
through the night before you left, & you
showed me your whys, what rotting,
what still pink. Or the flex of an old king's
fist, whatever kind of beast, the ways
power leaves, gently till abrupt. We runts
remain of the One Woods & men call us
great, urge several link arms around
one of our trunks for a picture.

Or a thing not a memory, because it didn't
quite occur. The excitement of moving bodies
swathed in sweat & smoke. The drums now,
the words later, the way live eyes
sniff & listen. Among them I chase you
that night, I cohere, I wish to know.

Your eyes crackle with fear of want,
not mine but your own. You touch
my beard as though a pet. I tangle
your hair with my fingers, still wish to know.
Someone moves in the pile of corpses, sighs,
just a little, I hush him as though a night bird,
the wind.

There is what few kings age to understand.
The world is garden, or garbage, or cemetery,
by how you stride your days, how you command
me, your Beast, when a pretty, or a foe,
or something small you fear & would prefer crushed,
how we together bound in the wide wild field
of dreams as you lay there breathing,
& beating, & a thrash, & then still.

I remember the night, it was three, or a hundred.
You were one, or several, as was I.
We'd fought for kings we'd never meet, never touch,
& never know. We'd danced & I showed you
that boulevard, those trees, your smile, long & it lingered.
As we lived, so we died, there were memories,
more forgotten. It was a time for believing,
my maps, my uniform at first light,
the half-remembered lover in a photograph.
As we together walk down empty streets, still looking on, still looking back,
there is no final thing to know.

The Beast & His Partner

We walked the One Woods together in my
 many dreams, you singing songs in your strange
 own tongue, its clicks & noises, the way pink &
 yellow & blue would burst from the trunks & bushes
 around us. It is always dusk, when light blurs
 & lingers, when a few stars peep out in the sky.

Then I wake. And you are far, as we agreed,
 & I am silent again. You leave me signs of song
 in scattered clearings, spears of your colors
 struck into fallen logs. I read them
 as they melt, sigils none other would know.

There is something you would have me do
 that I hesitate. You believe I was once a man,
 & you my partner. You believe we played too close
 to the Eternals in our drive to control,
 to shape, to break through their powers
 & time itself. Those years for me obscure in shame.

But your songs begin to convince me,
 & I wish you near again. The sacrifices
 we'll need to crack the maw will come soon.
 They will not survive. They will fuel
 the transformation. We will together
 blow through the heart of the world.

My only doubt is the girl not a girl
 who approaches again. I wonder if she
 is a different way. I wonder if nobody
 has to die. I wonder why I must choose.
 I find your songs in more & more clearings.

I stand now where we first met deep
 in the Tangled Gate so long ago, but
 this is neither waking nor dream. I stand
 here to call down the stars from the sky
 & find among them a truth to hold & pursue.
 I swap out handfuls, looking for the words
 of light I need, crush & fold & block
 their heat even unto themselves in
 my relentless need. When they speak,
 to guide my steps hereon, it is not men's
 tongue nor your spectral one. Their message
 is clear: bind the girl, consume the dancers.
Break the maw & absorb its every
 last dripping of power. She awaits.

The Beast & the Princess

You first came in lilies & soft morning sunlight.
 You first came in the puzzles & formulas men call dreams.
 I sniffed you, twice, but did not know if to call you friend.

You saw me & you jerked a bit. And you smiled.
 And yet you were careful. And yet careful
 had not been in your nature till you saw me.

I sat near you, & tried to look like a man
 & tried to speak like a man, but you shook your head
 no, no bother, in this Woods there is truth.

We played a game that morning, tap the air
 & loose its notes, collect the notes & shape a thing.
 Gently blow & lure its colors. Nod, exchange.

Last round you conjured a small white bunny,
 pink nose, mesmerizing eyes, tranquil but
 intent expression. I held it, felt its pulse.

You shook your head when I made to clap
 hands, giving the creature back to the air,
 as was common. Your smile bid me keep.

Did we meet again? Several times? Then fewer?
 Then all I had of you was the white bunny,
 who would sniff twice & be gone for days.

Soon I only had soft mornings trying to remember
 the field where we met & played our game.
 Where I did not need to conjure as man to please
 your company.

You do not return in dreams this time &
 I've long not shaped like men. I've long not
 shaped & played the air for games.

I . . . hope . . . yes, I hope you will understand.
 That you will help me with what I need to do.
 That you will join us as we clap out the rest.

The White Bunny & the Beast

The white bunny returns, sniffs twice,
 & settles in my lap, as though I am a man,
 as though I am a rare & trusted man.
 We still together, we watch, the morning
 is full of small movements & light sounds.
 Her long ears rest on my arm, as though I have arms.

I begin to remember. I am a fist of men
 by a map, I am a volcano burying all.
 I am many fish on many decks,
 breathing hard, breathing last.
 I am paintings in castles & in closets.
 The white bunny nudges me return.

We sleep. I dream like a man & yet.
 The white bunny looks up at me
 & I follow. Faster than any man's legs,
 holding a . . . white thread? Through oaks
 whose leaves remain despite the winter light,
 through places dark & unfinished in the Gate.

Now walking, but no longer a man's form.
 A girl's slender carriage, wispy torso,
 & the bunny is waiting near a hole in
 the earth. Even though I am too large yet
 we crawl through. A long long scrabble in the dark.
 My thread gives out but I continue to follow.

We come to an ancient structure, burst
 through a half-fallen wall, stand within.
 Words in my head say: "The Carnival Room
 is near." I am afraid, I am not afraid.
 Which is truer? My face in many reflections
 is hard, soft, hers, his, its, nobody's, all's.

The bunny hops quickly, ears flashing, & I follow
 on my girl's light legs through rooms of
 detritus & decay, at last to a room where we stop.
 She looks up at me, raises her pink nose, & again,
 & I enter. I hear cacophony, song. I see doors
 mounted on walls, beckoning. A tunnel into
 the darkness, where its long wheeled carriage
 intends. Two yellow-skinned brothers observing
 me, plucking stringless instruments, songs of laughter.
 A tiny creature at my feet, black & white,
 gnattering at me in . . . click-clicks & noise-noises?
 I am delighted, I wish to go. I look back but
 the white bunny is gone. There is a black thread.

I follow the thread back, feeling the girl
 in me recede, feeling larger & more helpless,
 burst choking & breathless from the earth.
 The return is swift, there is no adventure left.
 I follow the black thread back to my seat
 & rest with it in my hand, alone. I wake
 & don't look down. No thread, black or white.
 No bunny. Something wishes to convince me
 otherwise. Something would have me
 save what I would destroy.

At the Fountain

Remember some things. The Fountain comes first.
 But in my dreams, & later through the Architect's
 spy-glass, I never beheld it so crackling
 with life, sparkling with a kind of madness
 for me to drink, *drink*. How is it water
 tastes like remembering too? Yet so.

Having drunk with both hands, we calm.
 It is very tall, very old, yet powerful,
 & wishing to share of that power. Nestles
 close to, & yet apart from, the ancient trees
 around it. Good men built this long ago,
 they seem to say. Yet they were still men.

Left or right? No way on but choose.
 Which way in my childly dreams?
 Which way as my finger traced the Architect's
 maps? I asked him once. He looked me
 dead on, as rare, his eyes a swooping stroke
 down my cheek, across my neck, among
 the more daring for attention clothes
 I ever wore for him. One finger tapped his head,
 another his heart, a third his nose, but twice.

I think of the Pensionne, my adopted home,
 miss it fresh, leave it again, sniff twice with
 this feeling, & choose left. The walls around me
 are twice my height, a dark, thick mix of
 stones & vines. Very alive. The sky above is
 a blue . . . the kind I knew in those dreams!



I stop. Look down. Touch my face, my breast,
 my hips. I am neither grown nor become young
 again. I range at once along all my years.
 Gift of the Fountain & its mad waters?

Oh. The box of colored threads. The Architect had
 left them in his Tower, in a place where only I
 would look. The day he held me, the day I left.
 His words were gentle, salved my grief. Gestured
 to a loose stone in the wall behind our couch.
 "The rock knows more of time than men reckon."
 He sang to me: "The many kinds of time,
 the binds of time, & how it looses to the air."

Our couch is gone, but the stone remains.
 The box is made of oak, swimming in obscured
 sigils, warm to the touch. I had only seen
 the black one, path to the Beast, but knew
 there were others. I count a dozen.
 A legend inside the cover. *Ah beautiful.*

Before I came here, I visited the Dancing Grounds
 one more time. Felt what old in me snap off,
 felt myself burst through. The box where I'd
 left it with my clothes had shrunk to fit my blue bag.
 Now it is larger again. I look around, remember
 my friends & adventures here, sniff twice.

I select the green thread. "Recover something dear."
 Return briefly to the Fountain, tie it to a stony hook,
 begin again. Move slowly at first, as though learning
 to walk. Occasionally there is a breach,
 not decay, not time. The ruin of anger & blows.
 The ground remains like always gentle beneath
 my bare feet. I hurry. I dance. I remember.

I round a turn & recover something dear.
 My friends. My friends! From behind the hole
 in my bedchamber wall discovered only in
 childly dreams. Too many to count.
 I think they've all come. They crow & cry,
 click & howl. Nothing to forgive. Never was.

Remembering Her Exile

They lead me to a clearing where all may
 sit, perch, float calm upon the air.
 There is no gap of time between us,
 & yet the story to be told. I have returned
 to the Island, bid so by my dreams,
 they wait quietly & wish to know my path.

“There was to be war with the mainland.
 The King my father was ready to return
 & claim again his throne. I listened from
 my hidden place to his counsels with
 soldiers and ministers. It would be bad.
 But my brother’s death while peace-making
 had led through years to a sympathy,
 a willingness to take on the apocalyptic
 zealots who occupied the King’s capitol,
 prepared it ruinously for end-times.”

There is not even the twitching of a nose.
 A stray wind raises fur here & there,
 a few green spikes, royal purple feathers.
 These creatures know what dark cities
 men dwell in their homes & hearts,
 & they would wish me keep near to them instead.

“The King’s plan was a secret, well hid
 below the tribute of virgin dancers from
 the mainland which presumed to keep
 him satisfied. The zealots believed this kind
 of offering to be sufficient, that we exiled pagans
 used these virgins to appease the Eternals,
 maintain our ancient practices but contained
 on our Island prison. When the days of
 final fire came, we would be easy for their
 wraithful savior to find, to annihilate.”

The trees are bare here, a few fallen yet
 all lovely. A glint of water in the distance.
 I find this telling hard. I find it sad.

“The Architect had arranged my escape.
 I would go with the dancers & leave
 the Island forever. He knew, & told me
 in those last days, that the Beast did not
 consume them, in truth bore them far away
 though he knew not where. But this time
 it would not happen.”

Several of my friends join me in my place
on the grass. Next to me, my lap, near.

“He took charge of the delivery of the dancers
to the Gate, & thence the Beast. I was
given the black thread, & hidden close by.
When they came, I demanded inspection.
The Hero among them was easy to spy out.
As our soldiers watched, I knocked him
about the head, cursed, pushed him down,
slipped him the thread, & as I pounded him,
him smiling & scrapping a touch of
my breast, I told him the words
that would allow them to follow the thread
to the Beast, & return safely. For there
was no choice. The King would watch
some of their progress from the Architect’s
Tower, his great spy-glass.”

Now more of them are near. Fur of violet,
cream, crimson. Many bears. Three giraffes.
The white bunny, of course, & her fellow tenders.

“We left by darkest night on the boat
arranged by the Architect. We sailed
away without notice. The Hero commanded
the ship & all seemed to credit him
our escape.” I pause, trust my friends,
& go on. “When he came to my cabin
in the night, I had more words from the Architect
to repel him.”

I wish to finish. “He left a few of us
on another island. We woke from a night
of celebration, the beach empty but for
the half-dozen of us. Our cups had been
poisoned. I was relieved. The others
were terrified & looked to me.”

“You led them back safely to the cities
of men?”

I nod. “There was a boat eventually.
I told of our shipwreck. I was no longer
the Princess from the prison Island of pagans.
I was a traveler & a scholar from far lands,
& my party followed me in this.”

"You are tired."

"A little more. Eventually, we returned
to the mainland. The war was over,
but no victor. I chose to keep my exile
& disguise even when my companions
left me, returned to their homes."

I lay back, finish. "The Pensionne I came
to, I think it was the last gift from
the Architect. They knew me true
& cared for me. I thought I'd found a new home
but they were simply letting me rest,
letting me wish to return here again,
if I chose."

There's more to tell but I've exhausted
my hours. My friends lead me to a safe
place, bundle me to sleep among them.
I feel most the child again, feel their love
so simple, so vast. I fall asleep &
mercy of mercies, I do not dream.

She Follows the Traveling Troubadour

I wake & most of my friends are gone,
back home safe. Only three of my dearest
remain, & will guide me, my dangers their own,
always. The white bunny, the gnattering
little imp, the turtle who isn't a turtle.

My thread is played out, & I guess to pick
a new one, when I hear music & a
man's occasional sweet voice. My friends
press me to follow this music, leave my
thread be. He will lead us. He is the Traveling Troubadour.

We follow without seeing him. His music alone
leads us. I think about the Architect,
my reason for returning, & hope this is the way.

They knew of my Architect at the Pensionne.
Not ill will but . . . *something*. Even as they
readied me for my return, they tried to warn me
about him. That I did not know him so well
as I thought. I tried to listen but their words
were vague & hollow. You've called me to return,
& I have, I am, I do. Nothing else remains.

The music grows distant but my friends
do not hurry us. We let it fade. I sit
beneath a tall oak. Feel no hunger at all.
My friends sit near. We wait. Remaining
day passes. We nap lightly in a curled grasp.

The Architect walks up to me, takes my hand.
Grim as ever but glad to see me.
I follow him at an increasing pace, my friends
rush to keep us. We come to a black cave
in the earth, silent, impenetrable.

He gestures, once, the second time angrily.
"Go. Now." I pause. I want to say something
but I don't. I gather my friends in my arms
& cross into the cave. We are shocked
by what we see but I wake up
unable to remember what it was.
No Architect. Still beneath the oak.

I stand. There is no music. Consider
my collection of threads. The crimson one,
"for greater understanding," is what I choose.
We move along, the white bunny
hurrying us, the imp gnattering crazily.
The turtle is quiet, but not a turtle.
We are coming to something, my bones feel
its jittering power. Very close.

Wherefrom the Beast

I come to you again. I remember you.
We contrived creatures from the air,
like those I travel with. *I remember you now.*

You are an old story, far older than men,
old as the earth. You were created long
before men. To walk the earth. One, none, many.

You were not given the rules by which to abide.
A mortality. An I among many. You shifted,
& did not die. And then you did. And then you lived on.

You are unable to tell me but something troubling.
Danger not to you but to me, us, men?
I cannot understand, you are trying to be gentle.

Suddenly, fiercely, I see. *I treble in time.*
 Tree, Tower, starcraft, but here, not there.
 I look far & see how the future is collapsing back.

Oh. Again, here, my friends sniff me twice
 & wait. That cave. *I was in there.*
 The crimson thread in my hand. *I think I know.*

The Encounter

There are many magicks in the world,
 & I watch you walk among several.
 Your friends gird you powerfully with
 their love, their deep roots in the earth.
 The cave you enter to know better is
 more of a danger, but I cannot get near.

I follow as wind, as glare on water,
 as winter leaves. Waiting for a moment
 to give you word. I spy your blue bag &
 make a move. Affix myself as hummingbird
 & wait. Listen to your chatter with
 your friends. They want you to leave with them.

I can't let you go. I begin to hum close
 to your ear, risk this, you look around,
 but nothing. Your friends sniff twice,
 & I am exposed.

We sit. The tiny one comes up to me,
 gnattering in an unknown tongue,
 entering my mind, pushing things
 around, I cry out finally & you say
 a word to retrieve her to your hand.

The long-eared one stares intently
 at me & I strangely calm, lean
 back, nearly dream. She does not press
 or pry but wearies me & I cannot
 respond, whimper, & again your word.

The green-shelled one does not but
 sit in your lap, guarding against me.
 "I have no such friends as these,"
 I finally say. "I did not come to
 harm you. Please believe me."

You stand, bid your friends wait,
 we walk apart from them.
 “You asked me to find you here.”
 I grimace. “You’re greatly needed.”
 She nods obscurely.
 There is a silence between us.
 She no longer needs a teacher.
 She picks up her blue bag without a word.
 Her friends let me follow, at a distance,
 & I know the helpless fear of ordinary men.

A Wish to Heal

“You are not what you seem, a Princess,
 a usual young woman. You are from a far place,
 now gone. A beautiful place that was rotted,
 used up, by men not unlike those here you know.
 You were sent here, when small, to change
 the path, make the world’s path elsewhere.

“They could not know when or where you would
 land, but they gave you what powers they could.
 To dream powerfully, to treble in time. Their gifts.
 The blue bag you carry is my gift to you,
 given when you left the Island, lined with power,
 protection. Fewer limits on your mind & body.

“I am learned, I see through shells, but I am
 just a man. I come from a time men have
 ruined, & it half-rots, & I will not return.
 I’ve come beyond the Dreaming to find you,
 because you are the thread out of time,
 & this Tangled Gate bears your way.”

She & her friends remain still. Her friends
 know I sniff wrong, but I’ve come to help.
 She speaks. “What do we do?” “Pick a thread.”
 “How will I know?”

For a moment I’m tempted to reassure her,
 to tell her she *will* know, that her will
 & instinct, the love of her friends, my counsel,
 the deep power in the heart of the world,
 will easily prove enough, but I don’t.

"There are many threads in your box.
 Choose one, & we will go." It's not much
 of an answer. She's still waiting, as she
 often did when I taught her. Stubborn
 for whatever words unsaid. "The world
 is mysteries enough for us,
 & it cares for us in its own ways. But the world
 belongs to something else. You'd stare yourself
 blind into the sun & not know, not be sure,
 not be able to return & use what little
 you kept for your better survival." She nods.
 Motions for me to near her. Brings out
 the beautiful box from her blue bag.

Her friends sniff & do not like this box.
 I don't suppose they would but they remain
 silent. She studies the threads remaining,
 stares up into the light a moment,
 then selects the purple thread. "A wish to heal."
 We stand. She hands me the end of the thread.
 Shakes her head at her friends.
 "When you feel a tug, follow." And then she goes.

The Pensionne & the White Tiger

A turn & I have left my friends & the Architect,
 save for the purple thread. The path ahead
 falters & I find myself climbing over debris
 of vines & rocks. Soon beyond the remains
 of walls but the paths remain as small stones.
 Strange shapes, placed at equal distances.

Then I discover who is placing them, & think me
 dreaming. It is the white tiger from the Pensionne!
 My old friend. I worry this strange place will
 render us strangers to each other but he turns,
 sees me, & bows his head for my embrace.
 For a moment gone from wonder, simple happy knowing.

They gave me work in the great garden
 when I arrived there. I had brought no treasure
 but had heard the Pensionne was generous
 to poor travelers. My room was small
 but with a tall window for sun & stars.
 They let me sleep many days till I was ready.

There was work in the kitchen too,
 after the dinners, the one meal of the day
 not nuts & fruits. It was good work
 to lose my thoughts in, the water's hot breath
 calmed me, kept my focus simple to the task.
 When others joined, there were songs.

Some were war songs, which I did not like,
 even though extolling the King my father
 as a returning hero, half a god in his armor.
 While the Pensionne was far from the bloodspill,
 there was a greed there for news of the battles,
 a hunger for violence against the zealots who had
 stolen so much, a deviling wish to burn them all.

There was more often peace in the garden.
 It become my domain from before light
 to afternoon. Many days I saw only the faces
 of the many blooms, heard only shaking leaves
 in the wind. I tempted often to dance at dawn
 as I had on the Island. But my dreams rarely
 followed me into waking, & my feet rarely
 pressed me to dance. I did my work. I was quiet.

A plate in each hand, I noticed the white tiger
 through the kitchen window & asked the others.
 They laughed, said it appeared to a few but
 none too close, & anyway caused no damage.
 That night I dreamed of the Architect in his Tower
 & I asked him. Tapped his head, his heart,
 sniffed twice, but I stomped. "No. Tell me."
 "I don't have to. He will himself." "He's not
 an ordinary beast?" "He's a tender. You'll be
 his apprentice." "A tender?" He smiled at me,
 warm & sweet, I practically swooned like a gossip,
 & was gone.

I don't remember how we finally met,
 or what we spoke of our many days.
 I remember his beautiful white fur
 with its deep black stripes. I remember
 his blue eyes. Eventually I dreamed again,
 & danced alone at dawn those last mornings there.

He feels real as I embrace him, the soft growl
 through his perfect coat. I show him my thread
 in a try to explain & he pushes close to my face,
 makes me look better. His blue eyes
 are now flecked with the same purple.
 No longer master & pupil, but we will go together again.

Another Kind of Thread

We push stones into place, restoring paths
 to a great length of the Tangled Gate.
 Sometimes we separate & work at different paths,
 & I worry he'll be gone like he never was.
 But he finds me, head down for embrace,
 blue eyes flicking purple, & we go on.

Eventually we come again to the One Woods,
 it is never far here, & walk side by side
 through its great trees. My purple thread
 is running low, & I have to decide:
 return, tug & wait, or go on?

When I reach the end, we stop. I think
 of the Architect, & my dear friends back there,
 love them, adore him, sniff twice, & look
 at my tender friend. Really look. His fur
 a wildly bright white, his stripes a moonless
 night's dark. White & black, like my threads?
 He rears back & roars with a wonderful joy.

I tie the purple thread to a low tree branch.
 Half bury the box of threads among the stones
 at the tree's base. Tug. I hope my clue is clear to them.
 My tiger bows low that I may mount him
 & ride. Now we can go at his pace, which is
 as swift as my white bunny's. *We ride.*

The swifter we go, the blurrier the landscape,
 & I seem to see other things. The outlines
 of strange buildings, vehicles. I look up &
 there are metallic crafts endlessly shifting
 form. I feel purpose without words. A sense
 of hurry. Stronger than ever, a wish to heal.

Then out of the One Woods, up over a hill &
 below a place I should know but don't.
 Several buildings close together among wide
 fields, but these buildings are half fallen,
 probably deserted. My friend slows his pace,
 becomes almost hesitant. Sniffs twice.
Ah. I pat him twice, he kneels & dismounts me.
 We are here. *I am here again*.

My friend does not go further, I wouldn't
 let him. We embrace & I see his eyes again
 are their own summery blue. I turn &
 continue my path as he silently bounds away.

She Enters Clover-dale

Alone, I approach. No threads, no teachers.
 No friends save a sense of all these
 in the feel of me. Will what's to come
 be new, or further pieces to join
 with the others? I feel both potent
 & helpless, sniff twice, & near.

The steps up to the main entrance crumble
 below my feet, release to the earth as
 I use them. The first room is dank & cluttered,
 filled with kitchenware, weapons, books,
 as though packing & flight interrupted by
 death, or despair. No need to sniff here.

The next room shines with many reflections,
 an unseen light shows me as a child,
 a crone, a Queen, a beggar, a barebacked
 dancer, a creature like my many friends, even
 a great growly thing. Me a Beast?
 This one I study, take its calm for my clue.

I pass on. The air becomes outdoors chilled
 & I find myself in a featureless desert
 slashed by sun's winter heat. I walk & walk
 until I arrive at a kind of exit, a door
 in sight. There is a hut before it, & within
 sits a small exotic man. Old as deserts.



He comes out, makes to bow like a servant,
 I shake my head, touch his small shoulder.
 He smiles with several teeth but now
 I feel in him the same great calm power
 as my beastly image. Then he laughs, braying
 with delight, & begins to gnatter like my tiny imp friend.

Not thinking, not feeling, not sniffing this time,
 I gnatter in return, high & low click-clicks
 & noise-noises. A kind of play, but I knew that.
 A kind of song too? The more we gnatter,
 the more we treble in time, see this desert
 long ago as a great watery basin,
 far hence filled with starcraft.

“But what am I to do?” I suddenly
 say in familiar tongue. “Who am I
 to heal?” The little man smiles his lovely
 craggy smile, & motions me to the door
 beyond him. “Just play through, my friend,”
 he whispers, “& find the Carnival Room.”

The Carnival Room

In childly dreams I visited my friends
 who lived in caves & tunnels behind the wall
 of my bedchamber. My first time I did not
 know I was still sleeping when I heard
 a singing voice. I did not wonder, as one
 does not wonder in dreams, at the hole.

I quietly crept through the hole, listening.
 Sometimes the singing voice was gay,
 sometimes tragic, but it never ceased.
 I met the white bunny first, not a word,
 but instantly my friend. She showed me
 how to hop the tunnels, remember by sniff.

All admired the gnattering little imp, her strange
 play with objects, now this, now that,
 now here, now gone! But her tricks ran
 deeper, her play like a wise funny book
 written on the water, finished in the air.
 So many friends, & weeks of sleeping hours
 to know them, each time I climbed through
 the hole. The white bunny waited. We went.

I could not forget the singer though none
 knew where he was. Sometimes his voice
 joined our songs, our laughter, even the gnattering
 imp would seem to play & teach among
 his tunes. One grew used to the singing,
 like an ocean's tide. One wished to gift in return.

I gathered my friends together & told
 them we must make the singer a gift.
 A small box, to keep his most valued possession.
 With a few words I borrowed from the Architect
 (he had so many!), this box would be most protected.
 Every friend gave a stone, or a jewel,
 a feather, a scale, a nut, a clipping of fur.

With the white bunny, the gnattering imp,
 & the turtle who isn't a turtle, we traveled
 for many of my dreams, listening closely,
 nearing, then not so near, the singer.
 I feared will would not be enough, despaired
 a little. The singing grew despairing too.

I sniffed twice, & begin to laugh. The singing
 joined me, as did my friends. Laughing
 became a happy song, a song of finding,
 a song of gifts. We hurried, we slowed.
 There were no rules to finding him.
 He did not know where he was.
 We sang. We gnattered. We neared.

I felt us very close now, we all did,
 the singing filled us whole but, still,
 not quite. I sniffed twice, & took a deep leap.
 "There is a door," I sang, "& now we pass
 through. There is a door. And now we pass through!"
 And so we arrived in the Carnival Room,
 the root of the singing, its Tower, its starcraft.

One had to look around like singing,
 one had to listen closely like singing,
 one had to walk like singing, sniff like singing,
 & always keep singing, or one found
 one's self back in an ordinary tunnel
 & the singing close & elsewhere like always.

So much to see, a feast of wonders:
 vast, deep mirrors, with shifting tales
 writ on them—doors hung high
 upon walls, & other places they would
 lead—a painting of a great wheeled
 carriage on rails—& when I sang &
 laughed & gnattered my best, there were
 two exotic brothers, one playing a stringless
 guitar, the other dancing with a castle
 upon his head, their songs joined my
 laughter, & the general gnattering, &
 the singer's happy cries, many, one, none.

The singer, I learned, could only be
 found in this way. Not a solid form,
 but by habitation. He *was* his many songs,
 & those he shared, & this was his function,
 & this was his happiness. In my many childly dreams,
 I did not question this. It was answer enough.

Now, feeling like I am far from those
 childly dreams, & yet, I listen for his
 music, any note or quiver of it. The rooms
 I pass through grow large & larger,
 sometimes empty, sometimes furniture
 the size of mountains. Always a half light.
 No sound but my bare feet hurrying.

I try to remember the songs, even just one,
 but they elude me. We sang many,
 & many times over. Just one. Nothing.

Then . . . music! but not singing. Instruments.
 A squeeze box, two fiddlers. I come to
 a room of my own size again, dark but
 noisy. I follow the music. A long tunnel.
 Follow the music. Now a . . . platform
 above rails, like the picture from
 the Carnival Room! It is close, but
 I look for the musicians.

They are indeed three. An old man
 with a mess of hair, in a long grey coat,
 playing the sunniest day on the many
 yellowed keys of his old squeeze box.
 The fiddlers tall, thin, so very thin, barefoot
 like me, dressed in faded harlequin
 rags, dancing & fiddling with eyes closed.
 They do not notice me. I listen.

Then, I begin to dance. Not just to dance
 like remembering. The years fall away
 completely & I am dancing with all of me.
 Dance like laughter, dance like gnattering,
 dance like singing under the big moon,
 under none. I dance like the tides,
 like the tallest oaks, like everything
 I can conjure. I forget the where
 & the what of it all, forget to sniff
 twice & know, I dance back my years
 to far away unknown places, & dance
 on to the many I will become & know
 in other times. As the roar of the great
 wheeled carriage escalates, I return,
 as best I can. The musicians have
 finished too, & gaze me quietly.
 I am arrived finally at this moment
 of my self, this perpetuity. I am ready.

The Carriage Through

There is travel here I do not understand,
 brutal speed, like the hours & miles need
 more than tame, they must be *flayed*.
 This carriage speeds wildly through my mind
 & for a long moment my eyes remain shut.
 My thoughts turn to a memory, the Architect's son.

We were kept apart in the Tower, faces in the
 stone staircase assured his distance from me.
 But one time, when I reacted as a silly girl,
 not an empathetic person.

I was left alone, as rare, & no stones
 presumed to forbid me. I found him in
 his chamber, & a thousand candles lit.
 At first I could not see him. "You're beautiful,"
 a voice in my ear, a hand on my cheek, a breath.

I say nothing but move away. "Are you scared?"
 Still nothing. "I wish you belonged to me instead
 but neither of us is of this world anyway."

Another breath, there is darkness, & I am
tumbled into an embrace. Touched high &
low, strangely, I am not scared. Just the wrong
hands. Stranger still, when he for a moment
presses my thighs open to push himself in,
there is nothing. Nothing there between his.

I am shocked. I laugh. He falls away, cries out,
is gone. I return to the Architect's office.
Say nothing. I learn how that works.

I open my eyes now & I see you for a moment.
I smile. "You're beautiful too." His look
is inscrutable, waiting. "You were giving me
a clue." He nods. "Are we from . . .
the same place?" "I think so." "Is that where
we're going?" "You are." "But you're here,
in this carriage!" His smile is sad & leaving.
"Only a message. They will think you something
else & try to claim you. You are there to heal,
solely." I nod. "I'm sorry." "I wish I had
kissed you. Just to see. Just to know."

I am alone on the carriage as it marauds
its path through hours & miles, & more.
There is nothing to see through the windows.
I wait, afraid to dream, miss everything,
whatever I am, whatever it was.

The carriage arrives in daylight & I am
awake from lost time. I hear shouts,
crowds. "She is here! She saves us!
She is here!"

There are many, they are pale, they live in
these high caverns, they dream to heal
the world. They are failing. I am the waited
legend. The first to cross the Dreaming
from elsewhere. As I am shown their
small sleep chambers each inhabits most
hours of his life, the brew each drinks
to cross the Dreaming, I wish to comfort
more than I can. Yet here & there I sniff twice,
to know better, & understand.



They think I have solved their riddle, how to heal
 not hearts but history. They wait my command
 to help. Crowd around me, wonder why I delay.
 "There isn't time. *There isn't time.*"

Their many faces grow rough with expectation.
 "You came. You were promised." I feel
 compelled toward a sleep chamber, toward
 drinking their brew. At the moment I set
 to fight, to run, there is a roar through
 the caverns, the millennia, *everywhere, always.*

New Ways to Heal

When the purple thread tugs at my hand,
 we hurry. No longer at odds, we are as one
 determined to find her & help her.
 We've sat together waiting & learned
 one another. I have learned new tongues,
 pushed myself not to think solely like a man.

They take turns with me, because I am slower
 & must mind each one. The white bunny
 tends my hands, shows me their pain,
 spreads them out straight to my whimpers,
 shows me their beauty, lets me cradle her
 & feel what now flows bright & easy between us.

The gnattering little imp compels me to crouch
 low to her level & gnatter too, high & low,
 she clicks & cackles & adjusts my mind closely,
 gently, not simply to open me within
 & expose my all, but to scour out the rot
 from my long years among men & their wars.

The turtle not a turtle goes last & I expect another lesson
 or clearing, feel humble, ready, glad,
 but he falls asleep in my lap & I let myself too.
 We share a dream travel together,
 & he brings me to where she would visit
 them, deeper reaches in it, I am walking
 upright now, I am clear. I see the Red Bag
 & know this is what they were all
 leading me to, readying me for.

I wake & they are all in my lap, like
 oldest dearest friends. We sniff once
 like a hello, gnatter a joke or two between
 us, & then the tug.

We go together but there is something in this
 that is me leading now. We will find you,
 we will protect you. When we arrive to your thread
 tied to the tree, the box of threads
 buried below, I know, I am clear, I sit
 down with these friends of yours & mine
 & do what I hadn't thought to. I braid
 the remaining threads together, close
 & tight. I work silently yet there is music
 near, singing. My friends are near me,
 they wait, they are patient to my task.

The threads now form a much longer
 line & their power glows. This line
 will not run out. The box I stow in my cloak
 & I tie the braid's end to the thread
 on the branch. We begin together to find
 you, protect you, save you. I was wrong
 before that you are the thread. We share
 this among us, with these colored tools,
 the trees, the Gate. We will do this task
 together. We will learn how together.

The Believers

We know the words used to describe us:
 zealots, fanatics. We know the hatred of
 those who would oppose us. We know, too,
 how the world ends, dead air, dead soil,
 & a failed try to undo the disaster.

Once we thought the Tangled Gate was the way
 to undo the vision it showed us.
 Yes, I was one of the party that landed
 on the Island's shore, when it was all forest,
 found the Gate, saw what was to come.

We were given a choice: save mankind or
 save the world. We chose the first on
 that day. We each entered the cave of
 the Beast & brought it down. As the last
 of us emerged, there were no longer sounds within.

Now, of those six, only you & I remain,
 & we will never sit together at table again.
 Your numbers diminish by the years
 & what matters more is that I will efface
 you from history itself. You will unbecome &
 I will powder your bones on the sea.

All for the girl. All because you could not
 accept your loss, & chose to truck with
 the demons you call Eternals. Now she
 is gone & your demons are fled you.
 My brother, you fight on as if no choice.

But when there is nothing left, when the Island
 itself, & the Gate, & the girl, are all no more,
 perhaps you will come to me. Perhaps I will forgive.
 Perhaps I won't. Perhaps, as you said to me,
 there are stranger strengths in the world that
 will write our final fates.

That last night. I knew before the rest
 you were going, you would take what the demons
 called Eternals offered. I pounded the table
 between us until every lamp in the empty hall
 shook. "Is there none of the Saviour's mercy
 left in your heart?" "What Saviour?" you said
 bloodlessly. You showed me your fist, pounded your chest,
 then opened your hand, tapped your shaggy head.
 "These will save me. There is nothing else."

You see a hole in the bosom of the world,
 brother. I fill that hole up day after day,
 & feel his beat grow strong enough to *save us all*.

The Architect's Record of Time Beyond Time (ii)

Wishing you could hear too, I recite for our friends the last pages in my book: “The force of human history was on the side of the fist, not the open hand. Both were powerful, but one spoke to the most helpless fears of mortal men, that whatever health or happiness or prosperity was achieved, it would not be maintained. Beat would slow, breath would stop, mind would cease. Not a billion preachers of a billion magickal, instructional, or just comforting words could prove otherwise.

“Proof, assurance, a reply to despair, lay beyond men’s daylight lives of grab & fuck. Even as they belonged to their world in a way few could really know, their world belonged to something else. It lay in the open hands of those who had begat it from the ashes of other worlds, other men. While no longer corporeal, these others had their effect, nudged into history some of its brilliant moments. But they saw over the centuries that it was not working.

“The Tangled Gate preceded human history as a portal to this world, a crossroads where intentions of the Eternals could be made manifest. It is the source of human dreams, that nightly clue of worlds elsewhere, of many kinds, with offers of many threads. Dreams inspired men to build, to create, to raise up civilizations but, as before & before & before, it was not enough. Those who believed men apart from their world, superior to it, meant to feed blindly & breed more feeders perpetually, & explain their exception to all other life as the will of an invisible hand they alone resembled, failed to understand that hand, that it held all, that it was many hands, that these hands more & more despaired, that beyond time itself these many hands would contrive a child, not a saviour but the one who would take of this world something as it ended, something of it beyond it, to the next world, that as she passed through the Red Bag, she would no longer be merely human but the world itself, its lessons, its losses, its beauties, its smallest sounds, its heart living still as what was left behind was abandoned by the Eternals for lost, as men did not save themselves, as their world did not recover its grand & subtle power, as time itself ran out & the last breath, & the last beat, & the last dream.

“I am going back to find you, & follow you, if you will let me. Perhaps you need an ordinary man in the next world too, who hopes & fears as its men will hope & fear, who will help them know time & death & dreams as you have failed to. I leave tonight.”

He looks at his three companions, her closest friends, & there is no upset in them, & he wonders what he does not know. He has never loved the way he loves them, loves her. He would protect them all if he could, if he wasn’t just a man.

The white bunny sniffs twice & begins to hop, slowly, waiting. The tiny imp begins to gnatter a song, & follows hurriedly, as does the turtle who isn’t a turtle. The Architect stands, follows, catches up, the braided thread playing out from his hand as they go.



The Road Away

Suddenly, elsewhere. When I open my eyes,
 I find myself leaning against the shoulder
 of my strange friend from childly dreams.
 He is playing our game, nudging music
 from the air, giving it shape. His touch
 is light, gentle, but to its purpose. Turns
 to me with his strange smile, shows me
 his work. My friend, the white bunny.
 I am pleased. She sniffs twice, takes my lap.

“Where are the others?”

“She is here & there both.”

“Where are we?”

“Near the road away.”

“Away?”

His look is sad. He nears resembling a man,
 then more a tree, a swarm of insects,
 a high tide on an empty winter shore.
 But still sad.

“Please. I am your friend. I am strong.”

“I know.”

“Who were those people? The sleepers.”

“The last of men. Your Architect’s people.”

Um. I nod. Try to think. The Beast saved me
 from them, means me well. Yet—

“Will you come with me?”

“No. I remain.”

“And my friends?” The white bunny is asleep in my lap.
 He makes to stroke her fur, hesitates, doesn’t.

“They are a part of men. They come from
 the dreaming mind, the shaping hand. You will
 meet them wherever you pay attention.”

Feeling helpless, I begin to anger some.

“What is my choice in this? *Tell me.*”

The Beast now seems to comprise every thing
 that walks, flies, & swims the earth. “Where there
 is life, there is choice. But sometimes not
 the ones we would wish.”

I hug him, among his branches, his buzzings,
 his ocean deeps. His empty canyons, under
 full moons, his frozen streams, his spring
 rains. His green buds, his curling leaves.
 I hug him like my beating & my breath,
 my dancing, my music, my singing. My many loves.
 I want to remember it all.

“Thank you. Safe journey. Goodbye.”

Processional

The road away is long & straight, brown plains
 on either side. I feel as though something
 withholds from me, an unsure stranger here.
 Sniff twice, thrice, four times, a shimmer,
 nothing. I think of the white bunny asleep
 in my lap, imagine her legs extended,
 her ears flying back, tug for this in my mind,
 & find myself changed, thought & instinct
 one, tug a little deeper, & I treble in time.

A shimmer, a break. Back, hence? Neither, both.
 None, one, many. Here is no time & every time.
 The fields are brown, are green, are seas,
 are filled with starcraft. The road remains.
 I am not alone, but need to tug more clearly.
 I stop hopping, steady, close my eyes,
 feel around. There . . . a thread, but thick,
 it is braided. Open my eyes & see.

The Eternals are departing this world,
 this is their processional away.
 There is sadness but something else,
 something I could not have known,
 a kind of waiting joy. Something new
 to come to, open hands, open doors, strange chances.

Seeming unnoticed, I hop among their numbers,
 they have their hierophants too, feathered up
 like hawks & eagles. Their initiates in rainbow
 garb, simple, humble. Others who know
 better carry instruments, pipes, guitars,
 horns, sometimes cluster & raise up
 stomping songs. Staying near the braided thread,
 I continue hopping forward through the
 processional, toward the glinting, glaring
 thing ahead. It is the sea.

Distracted, delighted, I am become girl again,
 & wonder if this is the Island's shore, or even
 its same sea. They are all one, I realize.

One, none, many. The initiates, the musicians,
 the hierophants too are splashing, bathing
 one another. I keep a pace apart when
 I am approached by a smiling man, familiar.

It is the Hero who abandoned me & the others
 to that island. He holds out open hands &
 bids me listen. "It was by the Architect that
 I did all I did. His will led me through all my
 actions regarding you." The surf, noise, & laughter
 cascades around us. "Are you among this
 number?" "No. Not really. I was sent to guide
 you." Silence. He looks closer at me, arrogance
 & brute expectation gone from his face. I wait.

We sit on the sand, watching the revelry.
 He speaks again, but does not look at me.
 "I was made by agreement between Eternals
 & some men. My purpose was to contact
 the Beast, ask his help. The words you gave
 to me were for him. A surrender, a truce,
 that when you entered the Gate, you would
 be aided to pass on. The word you spoke
 to me that night on the ship when I came
 to you, it was the Architect's next instruction.
 It's why you & they are all here now. It's
 why what happens next."

We sit quiet watching celebrants return from
 the water, dry & dress. As more ready
 themselves, there is a sense of waiting for next.
 "For me?" He nods. His face changed.

"What is my choice in this?" He starts.
 "It is all by your choice. You will decide
 what will be." "When?" He smiles, stands,
 offers his hand. It is soft, strong. He is
 afraid of me, would kneel if I bid so.

We walk together among the crowds, further
 along the road, the evening coming on.
 "What did the Beast say to you?" Silence.
 "I asked him what a hero is, this part
 I was crafted to play." Silence. "He said
 a hero understands fear in others' hearts as well
 as he does in his own." I nod.

There are many shouts ahead, fields by
 the road filled with tents, bonfires,
 dancers, musicians. Stars heavy & light
 in the sky. I keep close to this Hero
 who understands. He coaxes me laughing
 to dance, some of his old swagger returning.
 I let myself undo all battered down
 within, lose to the fires, the music,
 the stars heavy & light. I don't know
 what the morrow will bring,
 I wonder about the Architect, & my friends.
 Then his strong hand grasps my waist
 & for a merciful while I don't wonder.

Fasting Day

There is still a long way to go, & the day
 is for fasting. I walk beside the Hero,
 lightly trebling in time but keeping
 my steps about me. I am agreeable to this
 in that I am not sure its purpose. The Hero
 keeps my lips wet against the dry winter sun.

Trebling does not help me know better.
 And what I know does not explain.
 As always when dismayed, I think of
 my friends during our best days in
 the caves & tunnels of my childly dreams.
 They are important, simple & wise.

There were then among them masques
 when the caves & tunnels would be
 entirely decorated, many instruments, singing,
 costumes. I would wear the crown of
 vines & pebbles, & preside as they wished.

One in particular, & very strange.
 I did not know which costume guised
 which friend. They were not dressed as
 sprites or oaks, sunshine or red berries,
 they dressed as men & women, impossibly
 strange for their creaturely forms.

They gathered around me, these beautiful
 forms of men & women, smiled me
 in ways impossibly loving & sad both.
 They sang as though one braided voice:

"When the glaring lights have left
 When the music has slowed to smoke
 When there is sniff of good blood & then no more
 When touch brittles maybe to break
 When best taste is old & cold, hurts

"The red bag, doorway back to dreams
 The red bag, the path, come
 The red bag, come, trust, come here."

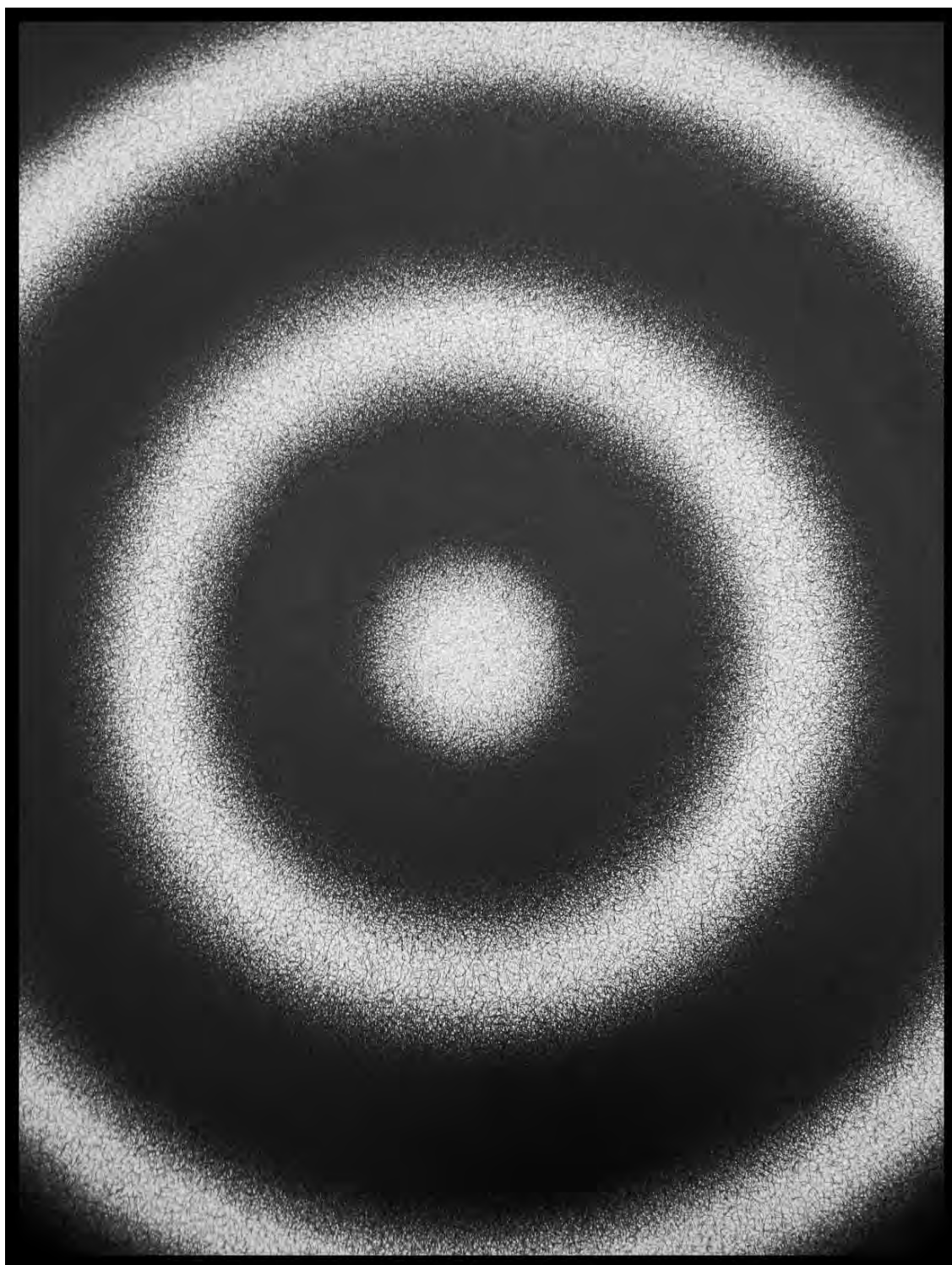
For a moment I see twice, then multiply, I am along
 this road away, I am with my friends
 in this masque. I am waking in my bed
 in the Pensionne on a wet spring morning,
 I am swimming with all I am to make the Island's shores.

The Hero catches me & leads me off the road.
 We sit in peaceful grass, the day
 is warm but kind. He makes me drink
 water, looks around once, feeds me something
 like a small handful of fruits & nuts from his bag.

"I am not ill. A day of fasting should not fell me like this."
 "I know. It's not that. We're getting closer."
 I take a leap. "The Red Bag."
 He nods. This borders his knowing.

A sudden good thought & I take from my pocket
 the few things I still carry. Knife, brush,
 my totems. One resembles my gnattering imp friend.
 I press it into his hand. "A gift." His face
 fears, retreats. I smile, the lush girlish smile
 he had longed to possess his own once.

"You're the Hero they guised you as. No longer
 a masque." He is quiet, helps me up.
 We walk among the hierophants, initiates,
 musicians. "I would defend your life
 from any & all." I nod. I take his hand
 in bonding friendship. Such an act
 is mine, not his, to do.



MASS MoCa Series #4

One, Many, None

*"Neither death nor dream
are truly a remote land."*

Remember some things. It's what I've returned
to the Island to do. I've lived long times
at the Pensionne, tended its garden, visited
with the white tiger. When dreams came,
as long they hadn't, they were of the Island,
the Architect asking me to return, to find him
in the Tangled Gate. We argued.

"Why now?"

"You're needed."

"You wouldn't let me when I lived there."

"You'd been to the Gate many times, I knew this then."

"What did you know?"

"I knew then, I know now, that the deepest truth of a human heart is its yearns. When you came to me,
you were forbidden the Gate in your dreams, & I only allowed you maps to study. These years had to
pass, time bound you to the Gate by absence & wish."

"Now you bid my return."

"Ask the white tiger."

I never find him but he is before me, head
low sunk for an embrace. Always the garden,
I've never seen him elsewhere, or enter it,
or exit.

He taught me in every way possible
what tenders most need to know:
kindness most binds. I often resisted
the far ends of his teachings, when kindness
seemed second to self-preservation, or revenge.
He insisted me. Pressed me again & again.

Of my dreams he would only say there are many
ways to heal, not just the tender's way.
"I have to leave, don't I?" Quiet growling
deep in his throat. "Come with me."
Silence. We would meet again in some way.
His last embrace made that clear.

My travels since have brought me to this road,
to an obscured understanding of what I am.
We approach a kind of temple now, it is
hardly dawn. A temple, a cave, I cannot
tell. I find my way forward in the crowd
is easy. A tall, feathered hierophant faces me.

There is silence. Does he expect words?
 "I expect nothing. I wait your will."
 "Will I find my answers in there?"
 He shakes his head, as though I ask
 the color of mine own eyes.

He steps aside, & I walk toward
 the door leading in. Aside the door, a basin
 of water, insisting a splash, a drink.
 I think of the Fountain back there, nod,
 splash, drink. Enter, not knowing if I will return.

For a moment, blind blackness, nor the feel
 of ground underneath. I breathe slower,
 do not cry out, something tests me.

I reach within, keep my balance, sniff twice.
 Images emerge in the darkness & hang
 about me.

I see the books of patterns my father & I
 would study, deeper ways to contrive my dance
 & sing of the waking dreams. What was this book?
 I reach out to touch it, turn its pages,
 there is something here I know,
 these are gnatterings rudely writ!
 I touch a page, fragile as a wisp,
 & words like "there is no final thing
 to know" lay upon my brow, clue & thread.

Follow the thread, half turn, & my brother,
 whom I loved so closely, finding me
 disconsolate that I would not see my friends
 again, listening to me tell of their world,
 their ways, never a denying word, just this:
 "You will limp now as I sometimes do.
 But not always. You will find each other."

Another half turn & my friend who claimed
 my father's heart, made off. I see them
 together in the chamber they alone used.
 Her straddling atop him, dark hair down,
 hips moving impossibly slow, head reared
 back in snarl, in growl, teeth long
 as she sucks him into her, deep into her,
 till nothing seems to remain, leaving
 the room, nude, him recomposing in the
 blood & sweat falling from her as she
 walks the empty corridor, him an old
 splayed man & her gone completely.

I press myself harder into this darkness,
 command to know, now I am small,
 hardly made, singing to rags & flower vases
 because they sing to me, we are alike,
 I try to recall earlier but it's like
 I wasn't born, never an infant. Created
 like an animate statue, no couple loved me to be,
 the King not my father, nor his dead first
 Queen my mother. I tire. What do I do here?

There are wisps of song, of a kind with my
 despairing, I reach toward them &
 they settle on my outstretched finger like
 a hummingbird. Singing, "many kinds of time,
 several binds of time, & how it looses to air!"
 I think of the Architect, & the singing molds
 his face in the dark before me.

"You've come."

"You've led."

I feel soft pressings against my arms & shoulders.
 My friends! I can feel soft fur, a tiny
 imp's shape, a turtle not a turtle close.

"Do I finally learn what all of you are?"

"You created us. You do every time
 there is a new world."

They crowd close to me, even the
 Architect is not far.

"Why don't I remember?"

"You always say because failure is
 an imperfect teacher, & hope
 opens hands the best. We are your hints
 of elsewhere, of others. All you will
 allow yourself."

"Is this world failure then? Do I lead
 the procession out there to a new one
 again?"

"There is a choice."

"What choice?"

"Stay. Fill the hole in the heart of the world.
 Bind the Gate here, to serve as foundation
 to all."

"Why haven't I chosen this way before?"

"I convinced you," says the Architect,
 with a deep heart's whimper. "I believed
 we could make a world without flaw."

There is silence. I drift from my friends,
 wander memories that seem departing.
 The sweet, high music of the Traveling Troubadour.
 The dark fanciful music of the One Woods
 when all woke deep in the night &
 cried out. My father the King on sleepless
 nights, his spyglass upon the black water.
 The demon tugging him back, away from
 me, away from the Queen, willing
 to sacrifice my brother, the snakebite
 in his heart never letting him rest
 until our Island home abandoned,
 & all to war. Never seeing her slip
 back into the sea as his boats raised
 their sails.

My blue bag. The many threads. I begin
 to fear. How do I know a flawless world
 can't be found? I twist in, & in, & in,
 feel myself starting to pull this world
 closed upon itself, its possibilities, even
 as glints & glarings of a new one nose me near.

I fear. Words are leaving. This is what
 they do. *No!* (leaving) *No!* (leaving)
 I try to cry out *help me* but it's just a
 silent wordless grunt. *No!* (leaving)
 Try again, the world shaking, the Beast &
 its mate together, comforting at this
 once again known end. Failure. Pain.

No! (leaving) *No!* (leaving) *N-!* (leav-) *N-!*
(gnatter) (N!) (gnatter) (N!) (gnatter gnatter!)
No! Help me, Architect! My friends! Beast!
Hero! My father the King! Help me!
White tiger! Singer! Troubadour!
Help me! (No!) (gnatter! gnatter!)
Help me, Queen! Help me, all!

A great roar, a wild pain, I feel blown
 all to light, cry soundlessly, & then
 all silence. Silence. Then a voice,
 my own, & yet I listen:

*"There is a door & now we pass through
 There is a door. And now we pass through!"*

The world spasms. The world shakes.
 The world holds. I reach into its maw
 & fill it with everything I've ever learned,
 ever known. I bind myself to this world,
 its flaws, its beauties. I push time
 back, smooth it like a thin blanket
 along a long, long bare back. It is there
 for those not ready to reveal themselves
 to the night & its many kinds of truths.

I push back, growing stronger, healing
 all I can, there is so much, & the world
 will ever root up its song in part from
 its countless fractures, how they chorus.

My efforts tire me, & I feel my friends
 join me, gather at my back, help me
 push, this world, keep this world,
 arriving, arriving now, arriving
 somewhere to something, close, closer,
 more, & more, & a push, & now, good,
 it's . . . water. Sea water!

I am in mid-dive into the sea,
 my things tied about my waist,
 bidding my friend goodbye with a wave,
 this time I see his face true,
 it is the Hero, my friend, smiling
 at me as once I had at him, thank you,
 I love you thank you, & goodbye.

The shore is rocky, no beach where I half-
 collapse breathless. The sea lets me leave
 but willing this time. I have bound myself.
 I have remembered some things &
 bound myself this time. I will climb
 the rocks to the Dancing Grounds,
 restore them for all I've learned,
 dance again on the girl's legs I choose
 to keep. I will let the Castle continue
 to return to green, the One Woods
 hungering back its possession. The Tower,
 with a touch, shall return to tree,
 & my Architect will have his day & night
 without end.

Finally, I will come to the Tangled Gate,
 that which I have loved best is here,
 always has been, not left or right
 by the Fountain, but *through*,
 no way *in* but through, I will step
 through the Fountain, its luring waters
 swallowing me as I do, & come at last
 to the caves & tunnels of my friends,
 leaving a part of me here, my childly dreams,
 they shall receive me as my beautiful
 dear friends, feather, fur, gill, shell,
 happy sniffs all around, but a part
 of me will draw a part of them away,
 away, deeper & deeper, ever toward &
 arriving finally at the Red Bag. Finally
 at the Red Bag.

And here we will close what has too long
 been opened, the wound that was the loss
 of our home, long ago, what brought us
 here, the remain of us, how we built
 but could not forget. I was made to help
 us heal but healing is hereon, not
 back there. We have done what we meant
 to do.

As many, as one, as none, each of us
 shuts eyes & imagines the conclusion
 of the story on the other side of the
 Red Bag. Closes eyes, imagines, steps through.

One by one, till all, till I am left
 to finish. I watch myself dancing the
 grounds my father the King built for me,
 hear the songs of my childly dreams in these caves
 & tunnels, had forever, the world's best,
 secret balm. If these pages are found
 & read, listen for the singing from the caves
 & tunnels. Join us in childly dreams.
 Dance their messages through your daylight
 hours. Touch & teach others how, they are real.
 Open hands, touch & teach others how,
 so close, smile, so close. *They are real.*

12/8/2012
 Cambridge, Massachusetts

* * * * *



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Notes from New England

[Commentary]

*"Please accept this ragged purse
of high notes."*

The following continues the series originally called Notes from New England, begun in issue 24-25 (Winter 1998), then revived in issue 59 (October 2006) as Notes from the Northwest, & appearing since issue 75 (October 2010) under its original title. It is intended as a gathering-place for observations of various lengths upon the world around me. It will be culled, like much of my writing, from my notebooks, and perhaps these thoughts will be expanded upon sometimes as well.

On the Making of *The Tangled Gate*

Initial Thoughts:

What it was like to write *The Tangled Gate*: it was fucking hard at times, having committed to writing a poem a day for 36 days, & most being on the morning buses to work in Boston. Half-awake, packed up, necktie on every day but Fridays, pushing the words to come, to be good, to press the story along, *to be good today, this poem*. There were a few times I felt good in the midst, like I had one going & it was right & I knew it.

These poems are profoundly connected to my others writings, & to ideas I've long had. They are culmination as much as new. I felt myself tonight, while writing the final piece, "One, Many, None," reaching back many years. Asking myself: what would a flawless moment or thing be? Remembering an acid trip from about 14 years ago, first day of spring, snow fall, I saw Bob Dylan's *Don't Look Back* at Coolidge Corner Movie House in Brookline, probably stopped at the McDonald's nearby before movie, & Barnes & Noble nearby after, both now long gone, eventually a bus to Harvard Square, & I felt so happy, so blessed that night, "first day of spring, snow fall, all is perfect, beautiful," is what I wrote.

By *Tangled Gate*'s conclusion, the Princess has understood a lot, & when she commits to this world in its flaws, rather than trying to perfect the next one, it is to me something said of worth. The beauties of a world root in its flaws, its variances, its idiosyncrasies. Perfection is only found in a thing being its utmost *thing-y*.

When I wrote *Orpheus & Eurydice: Making the Lyre* in 1998, I had less writing behind me. Less of the kind that sums to mythology-building. I've been doing that work since, figuring what my writing could be.

I can only say this: I write the best that I can. I devote my time & blood to it, & some of it is good. *Tangled Gate* externalizes who I've been these last five weeks, but also who I was up to that point.

I'm happy I wrote it. Set myself the task & did it. I like knowing I can when I want to.

Several days later:

I've ridden the morning buses all week, writing my journal, as was usual before *Tangled Gate*. But as I sit in the far back seat next to Kassi, the memories of five weeks at it are blood-fresh.

Tangled Gate is like a film in my mind. It has a number of major settings (Gate, Tower, Castle, Dancing Grounds, Pensionne), a fairly large cast, & themes that echo back & forth through it. *Remember some things*. These words begin the work, recur through it, become more plainly important by its conclusion. The Princess has chosen to forget, to try her plan of creating a flawless world with only hints that she is not simply a mortal participant. These hints, her threads or clues, are her friends, who are & are not her kinsmen from her own lost world. She is their creation. They know but cannot, or do not, tell what they know. They are sentient Creatures, but do not seem to speak her tongue, until very late on.

In truth, I do not know what they are, what the Princess is. I started with several Greek myths in mind: the Cretan Labyrinth, the Sleep Temples, the Eleusinian Mysteries. And a lingering air of Orpheus & Eurydice. I found these stories odd, especially the Labyrinth myth, full of characters with no clear motivation. They act. Their actions have consequences. But why? I think it's what a modern mind asks, or a child's. "Just because" doesn't work.

So I began this mind-film, as good theatrical films often do, with a story partway along. A woman leaping off a boat & struggling to land (this scene will recur much later on, again like films). Summoned to return to her old home, she visits its well-known places. As I explained, I discovered. Eventually, halfway along or so, the Princess enters the Gate, & she begins to remember. To piece together the pieces of her life, reconcile one thing & another. The narrative is full of tricks, contradictions, gapes, multiple explanations. Hints, threads, dead ends. Influenced as much by David Lynch (*INLAND EMPIRE*, *Mulholland Drive*) as by Mark Z. Danielewski (*House of Leaves*).

The Tangled Gate's legend "for those lost" is important, if a bit ambiguous. Ambiguity is fun in composition, playing with answers, trying among them, maybe not quite choosing (think of TV shows like *Lost*, *X-Files*, *The Prisoner*). But unambiguous in at least one theme: we need each other to travel this flawed world, & the more we commit to it, & to each other, the better chance of our long survival. The Princess knows she cannot find peace of mind or happiness in an isolated void. She does all she can for those she loves. She *tends* the world, in part by not letting it go this time, or by doing so in a way that ends a kind of cosmic creation-&-destruction cycle. The best of her remains in the world, & the long-held anguish of loss is released.

Still, so many questions: what is the Red Bag? A kind of portal? From where to where? What is the Tangled Gate? A kind of interface? Who or what is the Beast? A personification of earth, Nature? What are the One Woods? Of the world before men? What the blazes is gnattering? A language-less tongue, an ur-tongue? What is the Carnival Room & Clover-dale? Part of the geography of Dreamland? What is the Pensionne? A safe-house for Eternals & those they make? What are Eternals?

I answer question with question to show that I don't know for sure, & the nature of the story is, to quote Emily Dickinson, to "all tell the truth but tell it slant."

Yet some fun parts too, trivia for anyone who's read this far. The old man in the shack is a man I pass by when I cut through a parking lot on my way to work. We smile, wave. The

fiddlers & accordion player I saw at two different subway stations one morning when Boston transit was awful, & my path & the writing of the day's poem diverted from buses to trains. "The Carnival Room" I wrote on the Greyhound bus to Connecticut on Thanksgiving Day, Kassi & I bound to see my family. Began the bus trip with no ideas in hand. Then something vague, that the Princess did not know at first that her childly dreams *were* dreams. Then I was on my way, writing till finished just as we arrived in Hartford.

I was about a dozen poems in when I wrote in one of my journals: "I write them with doubt, but I keep writing them." I had to, I wanted to. One morning, to pepper my soup a bit, I read up on Joseph Campbell & his ideas about the hero's quest in *Hero With a Thousand Faces*. The hero leaves his familiar surroundings, faces many trials along his quest, has adventures & makes friends & enemies on his way, faces a final test &, if victorious, wins a boon which he may bring home to benefit all. These ideas did not guide me per se, but I did recall them along the way.

Toward the last days of composition, I slept badly, woke up early. I needed an ending. I didn't have one. Yet I think it was half asleep one 4 a.m. that I realized that the Princess had to reconcile worlds by sacrificing herself, in part. She keeps asking others what her choice is, & nobody satisfies her. She eventually chooses not either/or but *either/and*. She gives up trying to create a flawless world, one that cannot be destroyed like hers was, sacrifices a part of herself & her kinsmen to close the Red Bag, & yet also stays with her friends.

Conclusion for now:

I poured a lot of already existing ideas & characters into *The Tangled Gate*. These I mixed with the Greek myths, & set the whole thing to cooking in five weeks' time. Mostly composed half awake on crowded metro-Boston buses, about 45-55 minutes to write each, on weekends too, during a holiday, & finally finished at the Au Bon Pain Café in Harvard Square in Cambridge, my magic place for writing for 20 years.

When I sat down to write the final piece, I'd read the other 35 on the bus to there, took a lot of notes. I put on my beloved Polly iPod for music, grasped my favorite kind of black pen, & wrote into a hoary old notebook. I trusted it would happen. I willed it from within. The notes to begin this *Notes from New England* were written on the bus going home that night. I was a spent shell. I'd shown myself I could do this. I read "One, Many, None" to Kassi upon getting home. She smiled, & nodded. I'd done it.

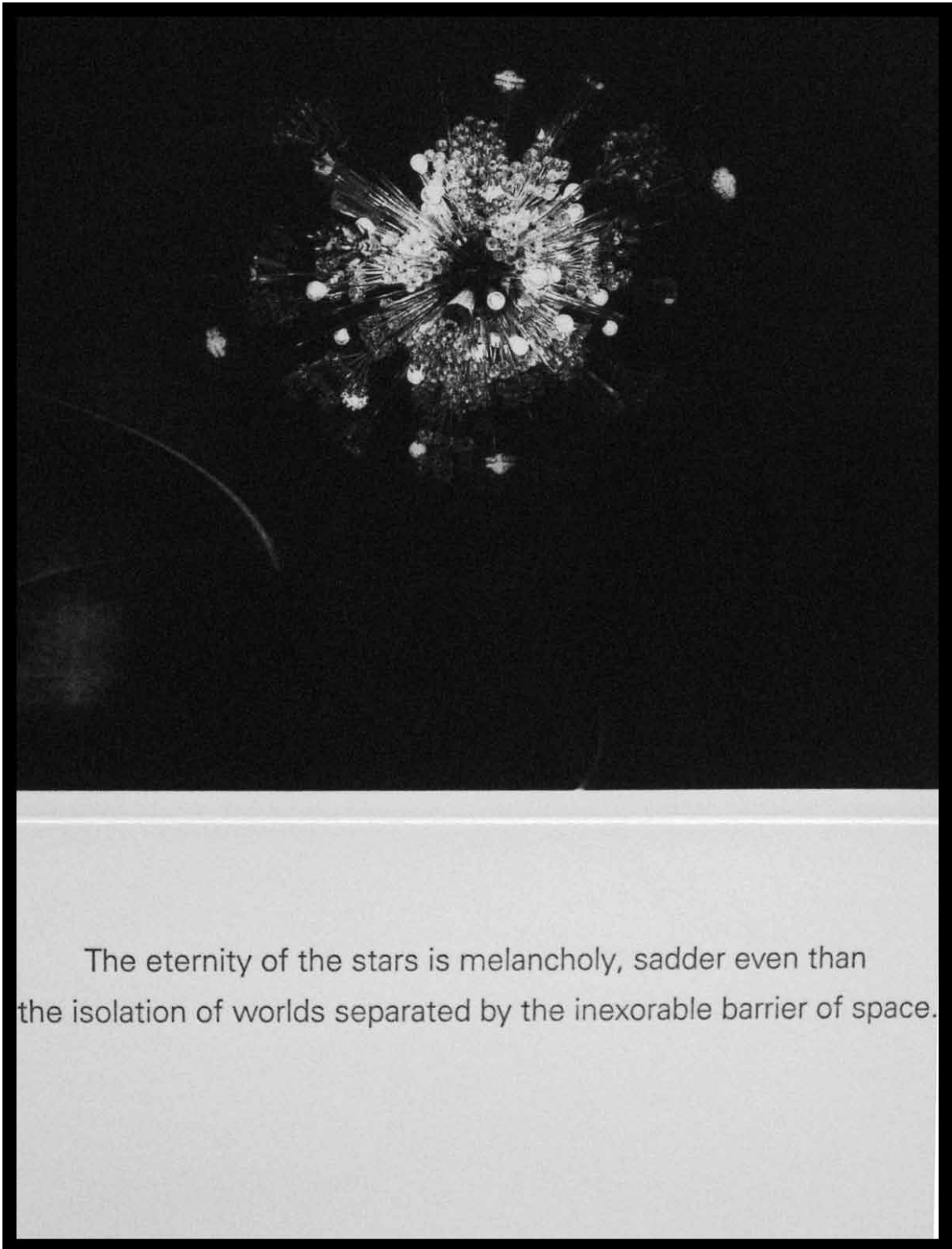
Earlier this week I added the dedication. Of course for Jim. I wish he were around to play along when I read it to the 24th anniversary Jellicle Literary Guild meeting this weekend. But as the Traveling Troubadour, he had to move along. Like all I've loved perpetually, he embeds inside the words themselves.

"What's next, Jim?"

He smiles, blue eyes twinkling.

"You'll find out soon enough."

12/12/2012
Boston, Massachusetts



The eternity of the stars is melancholy, sadder even than the isolation of worlds separated by the inexorable barrier of space.

Judih Haggai

even the quiet
is noisy
after the war.

* * *

machines in sky
dread in heart
another war day

* * *

bomb blasts
on them on us
noise of hell

* * *

first booms of morning
dogs and crows respond
windows rattle

* * *

silence
a refuge
before the storm

* * *

in search of myself
i seek out
one thousand others

* * *

open ears
do i notice
today's miracles

* * *

shut up and listen
secrets will flow
simple empathy

* * *

perhaps now
flamenco dreams
will strut my mind

* * * * *





MASS MoCa Series #5





Who Says Words With My Mouth?

All day I think about it, then at night I say it.
Where did I come from, and what am I supposed to be doing?
I have no idea.
My soul is from elsewhere, I'm sure of that,
and I intend to end up there.

This drunkenness began in some other tavern.
When I get back around to that place,
I'll be completely sober. Meanwhile,
I'm like a bird from another continent, sitting in this aviary.
The day is coming when I fly off,
but who is it now in my ear who hears my voice?
Who says words with my mouth?

Who looks out with my eyes? What is the soul?
I cannot stop asking.
If I could taste one sip of an answer,
I could break out of this prison for drunks.
I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way.
Whoever brought me here will have to take me home.

This poetry. I never know what I'm going to say.
I don't plan it. When I'm outside the saying of it,
I get very quiet and rarely speak at all.

* * *

[Today, Like Every Other Day, We Wake Up Empty]

Today, like every other day, we wake up empty
and frightened. Don't open the door to the study
and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

* * *

Someone Digging in the Ground

An eye is meant to see things.
 The soul is here for its own joy.
 A head has one use: for loving a true love.
 Legs: to run after.

Love is for vanishing into the sky. The mind,
 for learning what men have done and tried to do.
 Mysteries are not to be solved. The eye goes blind
 when it only wants to see *why*.

A lover is always accused of something.
 But when he finds his love, whatever was lost
 in the looking comes back completely changed.
 On the way to Mecca, many dangers: thieves,
 the blowing sand, only camel's milk to drink.
 Still each pilgrim kisses the black stone there
 with pure longing, feeling in the surface
 the taste of the lips he wants.

This talk is like stamping new coins. They pile up,
 while the real work is done outside
 by someone digging in the ground.

* * *

[I used to be shy]

I used to be shy.
 You made me sing.

I used to refuse things at table.
 Now I shout for more wine.

In somber dignity, I used to sit
 on my mat and pray.

Now children run through
 and make faces at me.

* * *

Two Kinds of Intelligence

There are two kinds of intelligence: one acquired,
as a child in school memorizes facts and concepts
from books and from what the teacher says,
collecting information from the traditional sciences
as well as from the new sciences.

With such intelligence you rise in the world.
You get ranked ahead or behind others
in regard to your competence in retaining
information. You stroll with this intelligence
in and out of fields of knowledge, getting always more
marks on your preserving tablets.

There is another kind of tablet, one
already completed and preserved inside you.
A spring overflowing its springbox. A freshness
in the center of the chest. This other intelligence
does not turn yellow or stagnate. It's fluid,
and it doesn't move from outside to inside
through the conduits of plumbing-learning.

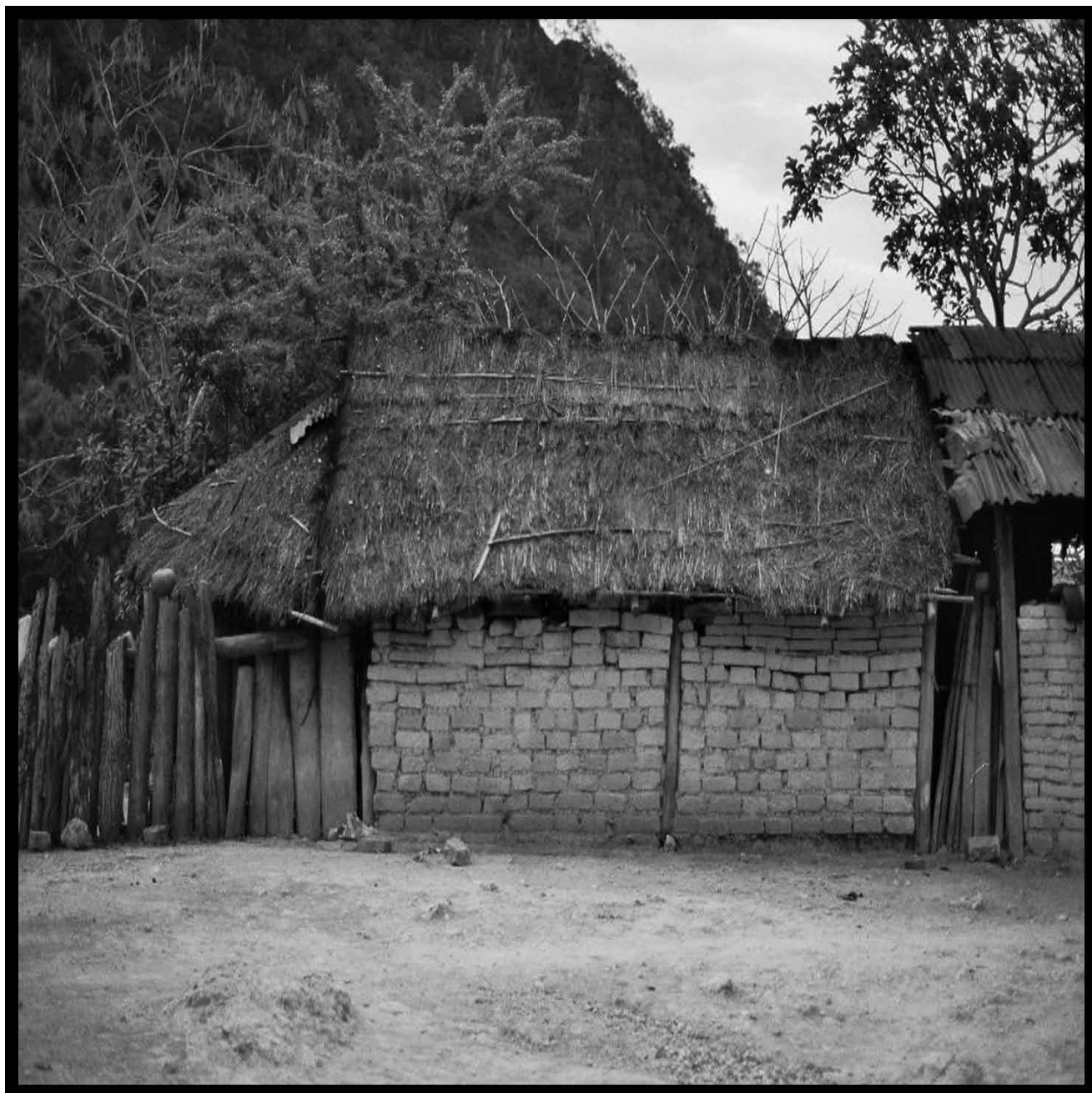
This second knowing is a fountainhead
from within you, moving out.

* * *

[Dance, when you're broken open]

Dance, when you're broken open.
Dance, if you've torn the bandage off.
Dance in the middle of the fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance, when you're perfectly free.

* * * * *





Gateway Mexico

[Travel Journal]

(continued from *Cenacle* | 82 | October 2012)

El Nopal, Cora Indian Territory, Nayarit, 1992

Andrés was fascinated by Nate's practice of writing in a journal. He watched him do it, and Nate explained the passages he asked about. The boy borrowed the journal and sketched a Cora ceremony, a shaman sitting under an arbor at the center of a dance circle. He sketched the village; at the bottom, in the area where no one lived because it was too far down the steep hill, he drew a series of five opium poppies at the various stages of development. He sketched his father's compound with three figures: himself, his three-year-old nephew, and Nate. Then he sketched all the poisonous animals that lived in the vicinity, appending their names in Cora and Spanish. He sketched a self-portrait, which was quite accurate apart from the fact that he portrayed himself wearing two sandals when in fact he had only one. He sketched the boulder next to the road outside his house, adding a giant scorpion perched atop it. "That stone is *el patrón de alacranes*," he explained, the boss of scorpions. "We give it cornmeal every year and ask it to protect us from getting stung by scorpions."

Another element of village life that Andrés showed Nate was a small wooden platform attached to the rear of each home. He said the people put cornmeal on it to feed the ghosts of their dead relatives when they came around. *Not a birdfeeder like the ones my mom has*, Nate thought, *but a deadfeeder*. He approved, and imagined mass-marketing it in home and garden stores in the US.

When he brought up his plan to go up and fast on the hill above the village, Tritemio said it would be fine, and lent him a ceramic pipe with a bamboo stem and a cloth pouch of locally-grown tobacco. He told him the hill was a site where Huichols stopped and offered prayers while they were on their long pilgrimages that ran between the Pacific Ocean and the desert where the peyote grows.

Nate hiked up the steep hill by way of its network of goat paths. At the top, he found a little cairn the Huichols had built with some weathered offerings inside: a yarn painting in a gourd, and a pair of god's eyes, little wooden plus signs wrapped with yarn to form multicolored concentric squares.

He began realizing his dream of fasting up on the hill for three days and nights. He felt he had risen above the rest of his life. All his ordinary concerns were down below, and he was high up with his hunger, some plants, some stones, and the sky. He wrote letters to Lily and made long lists of foods he had eaten at one time or another; hungry to an extreme, he could vividly taste things he had enjoyed years and years before, including the cream-filled chocolate eggs from the Easter baskets his mother had assembled for him, and the bowls of

cottage cheese, sour cream, and fruit cocktail that his father used to give him as a snack when he visited his apartment. He promised himself that when he got home, he would open a large can of peaches and, as quickly as possible, eat them all and drink the syrup. He wrote down his dreams, including one in which he visited the land of the dead and saw Hitler being punished by the liberal regime there, by being made to do community service, working behind the counter in a candy store.

A week afterwards, he went up on the hill a second time and fasted for four days and nights without food or water. It was even more difficult but he felt he was advancing in his quest. On the last evening, he filled Tritermio's pipe with tobacco and faced the sunset. As he smoked, he prayed as James had taught him, asking the Great Spirit for a vision and the power to heal. He imagined a vision that would flood into him from above and wash the shadows out of his heart, filling him with a gentle, brilliant light that he could then channel to others. Afterwards, he stood up too fast and got a head rush. He swayed, dizzy, staring around him, and felt he had entered the spirit world, which had been expecting him, and preparing for him as he had been preparing for it. They would meet again soon. The air felt thick as water, and his surroundings seemed quiet, conscious, and watchful.

One thing about being in altered states, he reflected afterwards, is that one seems sometimes to sense intelligence in things that one may not ordinarily think of as intelligent—trees, rocks, clouds, et cetera. He wished he had an *aná* with him.

Nate returned to this theme the next morning as, lightheaded, he picked his way back down the goat paths toward the village of El Nopal. The sky was electric blue and the dry hills were flooded with buttery light. He knew that if he sat down to rest on a warm stone, it would support his weight almost as lovingly as his mother had when he was a baby.

Welcome, he murmured, remembering Nezahualcoyotl's speech. *I want more.*

Back in Tritermio's home, he and Andrés slept on makeshift beds of empty plastic Coca Cola crates that were slightly softer than the cement floor. Often, he woke up at dawn to the sound of Tritermio gently singing in the open area between the rooms.

The gringo did simple chores around Tritermio's compound. He was good enough working at *granando*, prying the dried corn off of the cob with his thumbs so it could be soaked and made into tortillas, but he was the most inept woodcutter the village had ever seen. All the wood there was twisted and hard, but everyone, including Andrés, was an expert at placing the cutting edge of the axe in exactly the right place to split it. Nate gave himself blisters battering the wood.

He was better at singing Beatles songs. Andrés loved it when he did that. The gringo taught the boy to accompany him on the chorus of "Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds," which he did tunefully and with gusto, though he pronounced it "Lucy in the sky with diamonish."

"Diamonds," Nate said.

"Diamonish," Andrés repeated, his brow furrowed.

"Listen. Diamon-*ds*," Nate said, slowing it down.

"Diamonish!" Laughter burst out between the boy's white teeth.

Nate couldn't pronounce Andrés's language well either. It had a consonant between l, r, and zh that Nate couldn't hit no matter how many times he tried.

His reaction to the Coras' opium growing was negative, but he remembered that these were poor people on poor land, without many economic possibilities. According to his guidebook, the tribe had retreated from the Spanish up into these inhospitable hills at the time

of the conquest of Mexico, in the early 1500s. Led by a man they called the Nayar, the Sun King, the Coras formed a strong union out of a group of squabbling tribes, and headquartered themselves in a town called La Mesa in order to defend themselves against their common enemy. Thus they were able to remain independent for two hundred years until a Spanish army finally broke their resistance in 1722. The Spaniards captured the Nayar's mummified body but not his skull, which was smuggled deep into the sacred cave Tuacamota. Jesuit priests moved in and semi-Christianized the Coras before being kicked out of New Spain half a century later. The tribe had always survived, but the soil in the hills was dry, and they had never experienced prosperity.

Dreaming of ways to improve their conditions and wean them off the production of bad drugs, Nate suggested to Tritemio: "You shouldn't grow opium, it's really bad. You should grow marijuana instead. Do you know what that is?"

Tritemio responded: "Yes, but it's much worse than opium. It makes people go insane." Nate thought about debating the point, but he was a guest in the shaman's home and didn't want Tritemio to start thinking he was a madman. He let the matter drop.

It occurred to him that these poor people were no less happy than the comparatively wealthy people he knew in the States. In fact, they seemed happier. They had three major problems that he could identify. One was the lack of variety in their diet. Most days they ate nothing but corn tortillas and salt, and drank water and coffee. The second was the fact that, without money, they couldn't travel much. The third problem was the lack of medical care. Maybe Tritemio's wife would have survived if she had been able to go to a hospital. Nate's mother's criticism echoed in his mind. If shamanism can't save people's lives, what good is it?

Tritemio was fond of looking off into the eastern distance from a rough wooden chair in a roofed open space in his compound. A low, broad valley extended there, and after a bright, hot day, the sunset reddened the distant hills.

Nate saw Tritemio sad only one day. That day, he was heartbroken from morning to night. Nate didn't ask about it and the shaman didn't volunteer anything. His sister came to visit him in the evening and sat with him quietly in the kitchen for a long time.

A different day Nate was *granando*, flipping the corn kernels into a plastic bucket between his feet, and Tritemio was standing nearby, leaning on his crutches. The gringo asked him how people became healers in his tribe. The shaman's crow eyes brightened and he drew near and spoke animatedly. "First you have to go to the church in La Mesa del Nayar in the middle of the night and ask Jesus for permission to be a healer. Then you have to go to the mouth of the earth, a cave we call Tuacamota. Fast there for five days and nights. You can't sleep, just pray, and sit up all night. On the last night, four animals will come to you, one at a time. Huge, terrifying animals."

Smiling broadly, he started to tip over, and Nate leapt up and grabbed his upper arms to steady him. He went on, still smiling. "Huge, terrifying animals. A bear, a wolf, a puma, and a snake. You have to sit there. Each gives you a spiritual gift. For example, the snake sticks out its tongue and you have to touch it with your own tongue. This gives you the ability to understand the languages of animals and birds. If you get scared and run away from these animals, you go insane for a few days. Maybe your family has to go and find you. And you lose your chance to be a healer." He gazed into the distance. "Me, I just sat there and accepted the gifts, despite my fear. Now, there's another kind of initiation that happens when you travel to the desert with the Huichols. I did that too. You go to the desert and eat peyote, and

no one teaches you, it's the *patrones* that teach you, out there by yourself in the desert." He remembered Andrés using the word *patrón* for that scorpion spirit boulder. It seemed to refer to a spiritual being higher up a chain of authority. It reminded him of what Jacinto said about the *anás*.

Nate didn't want to go through the Cora shamanic initiation. It would require too much involvement and he had his sights set further south. So after nearly a month in Tritemio's village, he said goodbye to everyone and started hitchhiking through the dry hills, heading for a desert, and some mountains, and a town called Real de Catorce.

Real de Catorce has two claims to fame. One is that it was a silver mining town in the 1880s, with 20,000 inhabitants, and then the silver ran out and the population went down to about 800, so for the most part it's a ghost town. The second is that it's near the place in the desert called Wirikuta where the Huichols go on pilgrimage to collect their peyote. So he wanted to travel there, and then fly out of Mexico to Ecuador, where he hoped to meet a shaman he could study with.

The second ride he got out of El Nopal dropped him in a larger town called Jesús María. The residents were Coras and mestizos. He got to chatting with a *mestizo* cowboy his age and the cowboy offered to let him stay at his place. He loved country and western music, and wanted to know everything about the United States.

The next day, Nate washed his clothes by hand in the river and then spread them out on some rocks to dry in the sun. He sat down to write in his journal. A big pig drifted by, foraging and, it seemed, smiling at him. When the pig was gone, he looked up and found that the big new pink bar of laundry soap he had used to wash his clothes had vanished. He read the list of ingredients on the empty wrapper. The soap had contained lard.

That evening, he was invited to go on a Huichol peyote pilgrimage by the local director of a government agency that was organizing transportation for it. They were drinking beer on a bench in front of the office of the agency—the director wanted to impress his young girlfriend and, in a grandiose gesture, he invited Nate along. The Huichols' peyote pilgrimage was famous. Even before Tritemio told him about it, he had read about it. Maybe he could meet the *patrones* and learn from them. He accepted, of course. He was thrilled.

Later the same evening, they all went to a party, and a man whose face Nate couldn't see in the darkness asked him if he wanted to work for him transporting opium along the highway. He politely declined.

In the morning he told his host about the Huichol pilgrimage. The cowboy was happy for him and told him he was welcome to stay until it set off.

But over the next week, the Huichols who trickled in from their village postponed the departure date again and again, using various nonsensical excuses. He was frustrated, adrift, mystified. He ate *tacos de chorizo* every day, spending more money than he had budgeted, just to cheer himself up. He remembered Jacinto saying he would die if he didn't finish his shamanic education. He wrote anxious letters to Lily. Finally he gave up on the Huichols and hitchhiked out of Jesús María on his own, ending up in Real de Catorce a few days later.

He got off a bus on a sunny street with his backpack, in the shadows of some prickly pear cacti that were growing atop a ruined wall, and immediately met a pretty woman from the States. They got into a conversation. She brought him back to the hotel where she was staying with her Mexican husband, Mario. "Well, he's not actually my husband," she amended. "We just say we're married so we don't get any problems with the people around here. They can be

pretty conservative.”

The hotel was a collection of run-down buildings around a courtyard. One enclosure off the sunny courtyard held a gigantic pig that was being fattened up for Easter. Lisa brought Nate over and they looked over the gate at the beast. It needed to do nothing but eat all it could and lie in the sun. Like the pig that had eaten his soap, it seemed to be smiling. *He looks like he knows what the deal is*, Nate thought, *and he's OK with it*. The pig made him think of one of those young Aztec men who were treated as living gods for a year and then sacrificed.

“We woke up one morning to horrible screams,” Lisa said. “I thought for sure someone was being murdered. But it turned out they were castrating the pig. There was blood everywhere.”

Lisa's boyfriend Mario appeared. As the men were introduced, some tension in his forehead and voice showed he was jealous about Nate chatting with his wife. But after some begging on Nate's part (which was larded with the word *hermano* and the observation that they were both hippies), he disappeared and reappeared with a peyote button for Nate to eat. Thanking the Mexican, the gringo held the small, round cactus in his hand, examining its jade-like body in the sunlight and silently sending it greetings and blessings. As he bit into it, he saw Mario beginning to roll a joint.

The cactus's flesh was exceedingly bitter. Nate couldn't chew it without involuntarily grimacing. It gave the impression of intense freshness and vitality. *Pe-YO-te*. He spoke the word silently as he chewed. It was onomatopoeic. A soft green stone that was alive like the *anás* and thinking about him even as he thought about it. No wonder the indigenous people called it Grandfather Peyote. Mario licked the rolling paper, sealed the joint, and placed it on a stone to dry in the sun, then exchanged a few words in Spanish with Lisa.

Nate sat on the warm stones of the sun-soaked courtyard in the company of these two friendly companions as the joint with its delicious, pungent smoke went around again and again. The ganja takes effect. His perceptions change. The moment becomes timeless. Mario and Lisa are his enlightened companions in eternity. The joint is a kabbalistic squid with tentacles of smoke that shrinks as it uses human hands to fly through the air. Nate replays the events of the past week in his mind and realizes that back in Jesus María, the Huichols simply waited him out. They were right to: they didn't want a stranger along on their sacred pilgrimage. *Ah, I've been a fool again*, he reflects with a smile. He flashes back to the Fool tarot card, a young wanderer skipping close to the edge of a grassy cliff while his white dog barks and the hot sun shines. Nate remembers that it's said that the fool is protected by his own innocence. The gringo closes his eyes and leans back against the warm brick wall. In his mind, he smiles up at the sun and sees that it's full of ecstatic people working to create heat and light, glad that he's become aware of them.

The next morning, he met another man from the US looking for peyote. This was Jack from Las Vegas, a hippie of his parents' generation. Nate decided to join forces with him. They planned their strategy.

Real de Catorce is at the edge of the hills, right next to a desert as flat as a kitchen table. That desert is where the peyote grows. One has to search for the dusty green fleshy mounds under low, scrubby creosote bushes. So on the following day, the two gringos would take one of the ancient deathtrap taxis described in Nate's guidebook down the dangerous incline from Real de Catorce to another village, Estación Catorce. There were places to stay there, and a railway station. Nate had the address of a hotel from Mario. The gringos would strike out into

the desert in search of their quarry.

That evening, Nate was eating alone in a chilly, drafty restaurant, when two other travelers came in. In Spanish, he invited them to his table, which was the most sheltered from the wind. “We won’t bother you?” asked the younger, dreadlocked one, who looked like an Italian version of Bob Marley. “We’ll see if you do or not,” said Nate with a smile. He was pretty sure they wouldn’t.

He was wrong. The older Italian, Mauricio, cropped-haired and thinly mustached, started ranting about Jews. “They deserved what happened to them in World War Two,” he said. “They’re dishonest. Plus, look around Latin America. They never travel alone, always in big crowds.”

That seemed to be a good time for Nate to step in. “Look at me. I’m a Jew traveling alone,” he told the older man. “And there’s good and bad in every group. It’s no reason to commit genocide. Are all Italians honest?” Mauricio didn’t have much to say to him after that.

But the anti-Semite and his more personable dreadlocked companion Franco did accept Nate’s invitation to join his and Jack’s move to Estación Catorce the following day. The four travelers descended the steep road together in a rattling black taxi, ready to jump out if the brakes failed. They didn’t, and the travelers checked into the tiny hotel that Mario had recommended.

The hotel was run by a merry old lady with blue eyes named Señora Sabas. She was ready to put the four of them up in one room with two double beds because she thought that like her Mexican clientele they would want to save money that way. It seemed to surprise her that it was not their custom to sleep two to a bed, but she accepted it. Jack and Nate shared a two-bed room. Peyote seekers had covered the walls with graffiti. “*Muerto estarás mejor*,” noted one scrawl, next to a sketch of an object that was part skull, part peyote cactus—“You’ll be better off dead.” Jack, stretching out on his warm bed near the sunny window, remarked, “This is better than the Hilton.” Equally pleased, Nate took out a felt-tip pen and wrote on the wall, “Better than the Hilton.”

Also on the wall was an electricity meter labeled “*Wattthorímetro Thermofascio*.” It dovetailed with something Nate had been thinking about: how strange it must have seemed to the Coras that someone from the distant, incomprehensible United States wanted to learn to be a shaman. It was as if a young man from outer space, insanely wealthy, eight feet tall, and as pale as a sheet of paper, appeared in Brooklyn and went to the Lubovicher Hasidism, saying that he felt he needed to become a rabbi. The gringo thought he could write a science fiction story about this. The visitor’s name would be something that sounded as weird to them as his did to the Coras: Wattthorímetro Thermofascio. The Hasidism would think it bizarre that Watt wanted to be a rabbi, but seeing that he was serious about it, and willing to share a pinch of his vast fortune, they would take in the young space traveler and study Talmud with him.

Jack and Nate encountered a friendly Mexican guy in his late 20s scrubbing a pair of jeans in an outdoor sink. He introduced himself as Alberto. He said he had a general idea where the peyote grew because he’d been here the previous year. As they talked, it emerged that he’d been present near the sun dance that Nate had attended in Ajijic. Instead of staying with everyone else, Alberto had spent the week alone, eating peyote in a cave on the same hill.

At midday, Jack, Franco, Alberto, and Nate headed out into the desert on foot. Mauricio the anti-Semite stayed behind to photograph a cemetery.

A car was coming from the village and Alberto flagged it down so they could hitch a

ride. There was no room inside but Alberto got them to agree to let the four men stand on the back bumper and grip the smooth roof as best as they could. When the car started up again, Jack immediately fell off. The driver stopped. Jack got back up and gripped Nate's arm to help stay on, literally whimpering with fear. He nearly yanked him off as the car gathered speed. But Nate was feeling all right and his palms had a good grip on the roof. He figured the road must be very flat or Alberto wouldn't have asked to let them ride back there.

Ten minutes later Alberto tapped the roof. The driver stopped to let them off. They headed out among the creosote bushes, peering around. After a while, Jack found a single peyote cactus. He knelt and cut it as Alberto stipulated: just the top, so the root would regenerate. He gave it to Nate out of gratitude for letting him hold onto him on the car. Nate silently greeted Grandfather Peyote, chewed his bitter emerald jelly flesh, and gauged the blue of the sky to see if it would intensify later. The men kept on walking and searching, searching and walking. Nate had been fasting that day: nothing but a glass of water in the morning. The peyote diminished his hunger and thirst.

After two and a half hours the men stopped to rest under a solitary tree. Between the four of them they had found nothing but that one button, and they would have to think about heading back into town before long so as not to be out in the desert when night fell.

This day and night would be Nate's only opportunity to go on a mental journey with peyote because he had to take the train out of Estación Catorce the following morning, and make his way back to Guadalajara and then Mexico City, en route to Ecuador.

Under the lonesome tree they shared an orange that Franco had brought along. Then Alberto rolled a joint, lit it and passed it around. Suddenly high, as Franco passes the joint to Jack, Alberto and Nate half-smile at each other, each recognizing the other as a kind of zen sage-in-training. The great moment in international communication transpires when it occurs to the four that potheads in every country have special names for the butt end of a marijuana cigarette. In English, it's a roach; in Spanish, *bachita*; in Italian, *cicca*. They wonder how many curious names there are for it in other languages across the world, names coined and employed by people like them in altered states, vocabulary from a language of dream.

Their talk returns to peyote. Nate, who even here is a little ashamed of his weirdness, screws up his courage and says, "Look, I've been studying the Indians' traditions, and they all say that the peyote lets you find it if it wants you to. And they try to pray and get in tune with their environment, and they talk to the peyote with their hearts and tell it why they want to find it. So what would you-all think if we prayed and meditated a little?"

They all agree. Franco blows slow, soft notes on a Bolivian cane flute. Nate summons his memories of Nezahualcoyotl, James, and Tritermio, then speaks in the direction of the sky: "God! Dios! Elohim! Allah! Mother Earth! Great Spirit! This is your grandson Nate. I'm here with your other grandsons Jack, Alberto, and Franco. We've come here from far away. We've come here with pure intentions, wanting to find some peyote to help us get a vision of how we can proceed with our lives. Great Spirit, we're hurting in many ways. Sometimes we get frustrated, not knowing what to do, how to behave, how to live correctly. We want to walk on your path. We want to be better men. Please, if it is your will, share with us some of your sacred medicine and help us learn how to heal our hearts and live in the best possible way for ourselves, for you and for all your creations. *Ho.*"

The four remain still for a few minutes, feeling the earth pressing up underneath them, smelling its dust, listening to the wind whispering in the branches, feeling it on their skin, in

their hair.

They stand up and stretch. Barely ten seconds later, Alberto exclaims, “Ah, *aquí está*.” He’s noticed three peyote buttons growing together in a clump, and he bends to cut them. After that, they begin to find the cacti all around, as many as they wish, and they kneel to cut them, delightedly, carefully. Nate bites into a button, savoring the tough, bitter flesh, rejoicing that the spirit world is real, loving, and responsive.

It’s Franco who finds the largest button. This specimen looks so much like the face of a smiling clown that Nate takes a picture of it. He is mistakenly convinced that this will prove once and for all the existence of the spirit world and the validity of shamanism.

They’re walking on the road in the direction of Estación Catorce when Jack remarks, “You know, it sounds crazy but it almost seems like praying helped us find the peyote.”

Through a mouthful of cactus, Nate mutters, “Yeah.” *Duh*.

A little later, Jack remarks, “I wish we had a ride back into town.”

Nate says, “Why don’t you pray for one?”

Jack says, “Hm.”

Five minutes later a pickup truck stops and they climb in the back and head toward Estación Catorce.

Nate has read that peyote can amplify one’s sense of balance, and he finds this true. As they speed down the road he stands in the back of the pickup without fear, not holding on to anything, just chatting with his new friends, keeping an eye on the smooth road ahead. The people in the cab wave at him to sit down. Disappointed, he obeys.

Back in town they find Maurice looking very civilized, having a chicken dinner at a tiny square metal table outside a tiny restaurant. Jack and Nate buy cheese and tortillas and return to the hotel while Alberto and Franco stay in town to try to buy marijuana.

Jack wants to go to sleep early. Alberto and Franco get back to the hotel and they and Nate go into Alberto’s room. They unwrap a piece of newspaper with plenty of ganja in it, and begin to roll joints. Nate lights a fire in the fireplace in the corner of the room, melts cheese over tortillas and feeds the three of them. Still eating peyote slowly and steadily, one button per hour, he passes up the pot most of the time. Alberto has a guitar and some photocopies of Beatles lyrics, so they sing in between conversations in Spanish.

Franco remarks, “I feel a little nauseous from the peyote and I wonder if I should make myself throw up.”

Alberto says, “Sometimes it’s best to just let it settle.”

Nate counters, “No, it’s always better to purify yourself. Even if you feel just a little nauseous when you’re in the middle of the city, like on the steps outside a bank.” Alberto and Franco double up in laughter. Nate mimes vomiting, and speaks to an imaginary passerby: “Terribly sorry, madam, I simply must purify myself, you know.”

Franco stands up and stretches and inquires petulantly of the universe, “I wonder if there’s any place in town that would be open to sell me a beer right now.”

Of course there isn’t. Alberto, who is ordinarily very laid back, erupts, “Half an ounce of dope on the table and all this fucking Italian can think about is beer!” They all laugh until their bellies hurt.

The gringo heads outside to look at the stars. Señora Sabas is standing at the gate. “What are you doing?” she quizzes. It’s about midnight.

“When one eats peyote, one often has the urge to go look at the stars,” he says.



"I never took peyote," she says.

"*Cada quien a su gusto*," he says. To each his own. They chat for a while. She tells him about her life in that town, and how her grandfather came from Germany, which explains her blue eyes, unusual for a Mexican. The conversation ends, neatly, by mutual consent, and she goes inside.

He goes out walking through the village. He stops to look up at the stars, wondering about his life. Where is he going to live? Should he live in Latin America? How will he earn his bread? What is going to happen when he gets to Ecuador? Can he ever heal himself? Will he marry Lily? Or someone else? Does he need a wife who is as spiritual as he is? Will he ever have children? What kind of father could he be? He thinks he might be able to start a family outside the US, outside that network of energy that harmed him. Maybe he can live in Latin America and work as a shaman.

Unlike Nezahualcoyotl, he does want to predict his own future. Isn't it possible to do it by looking at the stars? He peers up at them, but they tell him nothing, just sway there sparkling in the cold velvety sky. He goes on walking.

Great Spirit, grant me a vision, he prays, *and the power to heal. Illuminate the path I'm here to take. Grant me a vision so bright it will blow the shadows out of my soul. I don't want to live in darkness anymore.*

He circles back and goes inside and sings and talks with Alberto and Franco. He eats one last peyote button. He's now eaten one button per hour for fourteen hours. That's enough, he decides. Fourteen hours, fourteen buttons, and fourteen is the name of the town: Real de Catorce, Royal of Fourteen. His guidebook says nobody knows what that means, though there are a couple of theories. In any case, a lucky number.

All of a sudden a carload of boisterous Mexicans shows up. They're friends of Alberto's. Señora Sabas is woken up and finds rooms for them. Soon they join the men in Alberto's room. They share out organic baked goods and discuss their plans for hunting peyote.

The room suddenly seems too loud and too full. Nate goes out walking again, this time heading from the road into the desert.

The night fog is in, moistening the plants. In the dimness, the stones on the road dart like mice as he looks at them. When he closes his eyes as he walks, he sees horrible visions: a soldier's bleeding face wrapped in barbed wire; children being crushed by tanks; skulls enveloped in flame. The solution comes to him: *Don't walk with your eyes closed, idiot.*

The night before, he dreamt he was walking out here and he found a vast corral where ghostly ranchers took care of herds of extinct mammals.

Were the ranchers the *patrones* that Tritermio mentioned?

Sitting cross-legged at the roadside, he closes his eyes and observes the glowing yellow outlines of a rectangular box. Within the box, several distinct energies are moving. One is a jagged blue line. When it touches and slowly rebounds off the invisible walls of the box, he hears a man's voice speaking polysyllabic words in a clear tone. Each word contains phonemes from three languages, Spanish, Italian and Huichol. The voice speaks these words forwards or backwards depending on the direction from which it meets the wall. He thinks about his brain as a recording studio that recorded the sounds and then remixed them.

He gets to his feet and walks on. A round hole a meter wide is floating in the air ahead of him and above him. Parallel to the ground like a skylight, it's full of light, color, and rushing wind, a stunning contrast to the surrounding darkness. Ecstatic, multicolored people are

standing up there looking down through it at him. Since he started reading about shamanism, he's wondered if, as the shamans claim, there are other dimensions. Now the answer is before him. "Come up and join us," the people indicate, speaking to him telepathically.

"Not now," he replies. He doesn't know if he would be able to return if he went there. Or how he would get up there in the first place. "Thank you. Maybe later, when I have a guide." He walks on.

Ahead of him in the fog, five or six coyotes begin to howl. He stops to listen. He's never heard anything so beautiful. Their artistry is breathtaking. He doesn't know what coyotes are anymore. These seem gods that have descended from the sky to teach and tantalize him with dreamlike yet hyper-real information.

When they fall silent he turns and heads back, aware of tall, thin, gray letters that glide past each other, spelling non-words in the darkness around him.

Dawn breaks. He packs his backpack without waking Jack. The others are asleep in their rooms. He settles his bill with Señora Sabas and gets into another long conversation with her. She mentions her cheese-making business. He buys from her a wheel of handmade white cheese.

He catches the 7 a.m. train, an old slow one that his guidebook says is called the Burro. It's packed with sleepy, good-natured Mexicans. There are no seats left so he sits on a sack of corn in the aisle next to his pack. Nearby, a man smiles knowingly at him before openly splitting a large peyote button in half and sharing it with his friend. Two kids on the seat next to Nate, a brother and a sister about nine or ten, put their jackets over their heads and gently swat each other with the sleeves, pretending to be elephants. When he closes his eyes, he can see designs. *Great Spirit, please grant me a vision and the power to heal.*

He feels hunger and starts to rummage for the wheel of cheese before realizing that he left it on top of Señora Sabas's refrigerator when he walked out of her house. She's shorter than the refrigerator, so he imagines it might remain there for a while.

When they reach the train station in San Luis Potosí at 11 a.m., he's well rested, though he hasn't slept a wink. Getting off the train he sees a perturbed light-skinned man on the platform. The pale man says, "Excuse me, do you speak English?"

"Sure, I'm from Michigan. Where are you from?"

"Ohio."

He tells Nate his name is Ray. He's been traveling with another guy from Ohio who drinks way too much and has "all kinds of other problems" which he doesn't specify. Ray has never been outside the States before and speaks no Spanish. He needs help to cash travelers checks so he can start heading home by himself.

No problem. They go to a bank and change \$100 in checks into pesos. Nate can't resist chatting up the girls who work behind the counter. It's the mood he's in. Ray says he's going to meet another American guy at an ice cream shop, a missionary. Would Nate like to come? Sure, why not.

Greg the missionary makes Nate think of a slightly warped reflection of himself: as close as one could get to being him without actually being him. He even looks like Nate. Over sundaes, Greg tells Nate and Ray his story. Born in upstate New York, he got into drugs and alcohol, then found solace in a spirituality that included Martin Buber's books and the Evangelical movement. He's been living in Mexico for a year and a half, loving the adventurous lifestyle, the new language, the feeling of closeness to God.

"This one time we were driving our van into Mexico City," he says. "We always had trouble with that van and we never had money to fix it. So I'm driving, and we're going down this long, long, straight hill, and suddenly this girl sitting next to me screams, '*¡Gregorio! ¡Mire, mire! ¡La llanta!*' I look at the road in front of the van and I see our rear wheel rolling away ahead of us down the highway!"

For several years Nate has thought of himself as a kind of anti-missionary, or as a pagan missionary. He figures Christians have no business going around the world brainwashing people to leave behind their old religions. But now, he's enjoying Greg's conversation so much that when the missionary invites Ray and him to have lunch at the church, he's able to smoothly accept.

Sitting in the church kitchen with Greg and Ray and a gaggle of friendly Mexican women, Nate feels utterly content. The pork in chocolate-and-chilipepper *mole* sauce with corn tortillas is a culinary *tour de force*, the gustatory equivalent of the coyotes' singing the night before. "Who made this miracle?" he inquires. No one wants to accept the praise, but he can see that one woman looks especially pleased. For the next half hour he jokes with them nonstop in Spanish. He has everyone but Ray in stitches. They're nearly falling off the chairs and tables they're sitting on.

Eventually a clock is looked at. "Would you like to come to the *culto*, the church service?" Ray and he are asked delicately.

Certainly. That seems to be the way the current is flowing. Sitting in a pew, listening to a medley of testimonials from people about how they had been dissolute alcoholics and then found Christ, Nate starts to tire. The service lasts over an hour. Afterwards, outside, Greg gives him a copy of the New Testament in Spanish, a little one with a green plastic cover and the Psalms and Proverbs included. Nate says goodbye to his new friends, wishes Ray luck in getting home, and saunters off to find the bus station.

A few minutes later he has to stop to ask the way. Even when he hasn't eaten peyote, he has a very, very poor sense of direction. He gets into a forty-minute philosophical discussion with two men standing on a street corner. One of them gives him his address so he can look him up the next time he's in town. The Mexican also sketches the gringo a map to the bus station.

As he walks away, he realizes he'll have to scrap his old ideas about intelligence. He's always believed there's a scale of it where some people are smarter and some people are stupider. Intellectuals like his immediate family are up at the top, and on down the line to manual laborers and people who do poorly in school. *But now*, he thinks, *I see that finding people's intelligence is simply a matter of being able to communicate with them. And if someone seems stupid, it's only because I can't relate to them. Their mind is functioning just as well as mine is, it's just processing different information.* As he walks under the late afternoon sky with written directions to the bus station in his hand, the world seems a much smarter place.

At the station he gets into a conversation with a sharply-dressed, dignified rancher in his fifties. "Where are you coming from?" the rancher asks.

"From Real de Catorce," he says.

"Ah, *el peyotito*."

"Do you know it too?"

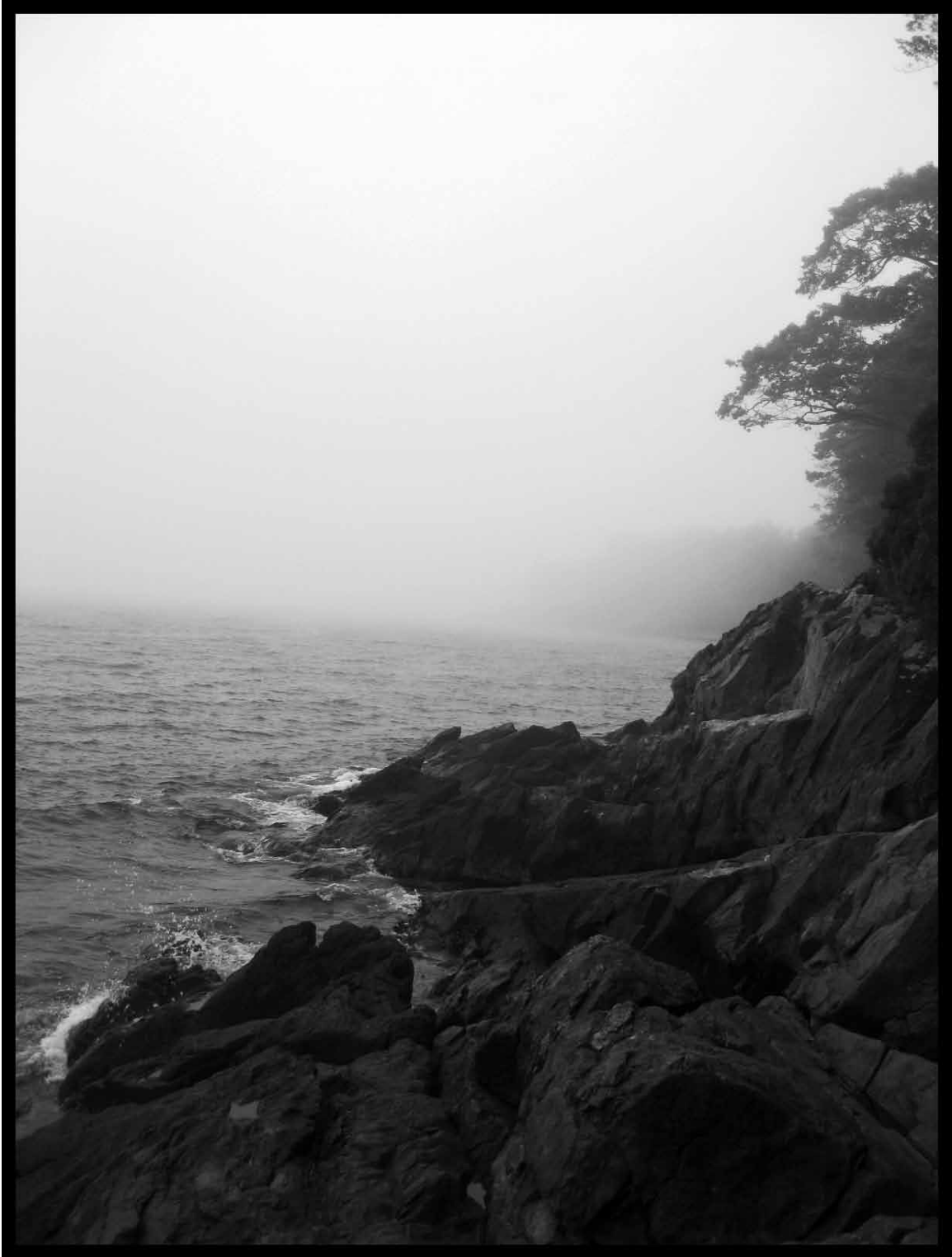
"Yes. We have great respect for that. It's very useful if one wants to know oneself better." The men discuss the matter at length.

The bus for Guadalajara pulls out, with Nate on it. He opens the little green Bible that Greg gave him to Psalm 49 and reads, “Why need I fear when evil days come? Only my own sins can ensnare me.” Words to savor and to remember. But he’s been awake for two days and a night, so the cells in his brain are beginning to pull down their shades and draw their drapes. He shuts the book and lets his eyes close too.

The ride to Guadalajara was long and uncomfortable. After he got there and went to the home of the family he stayed with, he was tired for a whole day, disappointing his hosts because they wanted to hear well-told tales of the adventures of the gringo who wanted to be a shaman.

* * * * *





Joe Coleman



The Lovely Haunting

He traveled years of hopeful distance
 hot within his tarnished armor.
 Then came that sultry afternoon . . .
 He came upon a feathered beach.

(Etch this everlasting scene:
 coal-crowned idol,
 mighty tyrant,
 whose wiry throne, whose wooden scepter,
 welcomes him: "Grey foreign hero—
 ask—
 receive—
 and take possession!")

He, thirsty, craved the handled vessel.
 Sought. Discovered.
 Drank. Desiring.
 With pioneering lips consumed,
 exploratory fingers clutching.

North, he found his Florida—
 the hidden mythic flowing fountain.
 He sipped on never-lasting youth.

Gripped by lovely haunting echoes,
 remnants, ghosts, and empty vessels,
 his weakly mocking aging flesh remembers one ghost willing,
 singing pity for raw desperation.
 He damns that phantom.
 He surrenders.

Etching is the art of acids.

* * *

Mind's Eye Candy
(from the Jacobin Cycle)

Butterscotch:

sugary
 smooth and inviting
 agreeable
 tasty
 delicious confection.

Imagine a wonderful mouthful of Butterscotch
 there for the taking
 —however unlikely—
 as Butterscotch after a hot shower
 toweled
 flows toward your armchair
 droplets of moisture on candybar neck
 with tempting
 receptive
 smiling lips willingly
 offering: “Try me. . .” (as if it means nothing).
 Knowing your sweet tooth is aching and throbbing
 the towel comes off like a kind paper wrapper
 then naked desire in golden-brown coating—
 then melting—
 and stickiness—
 licking of fingers . . .

Imagination is unfulfilled hunger.

Today look away from the flavorful possible.
 Starve through tomorrows of cold showers wanting.
 Butterscotch seems to be sweet on another.
 Perhaps she is only a transient craving
 —a snack of the month—
 —a distraction—
 —soon history.

Frustrating fixation, this Butterscotch love...

* * *

**Weeks of Absent Muse
(from the Jacobin Cycle)**

Those weeks were a frantic river.
I was thirsty for your rush
when what I wanted to, could not, say flowed thru' your cool, clear voice.

Once your words were a welcome flood.
Where has that sweeter water gone?
—Down to a brackish, sluggish river.
Those weeks have gone to choke with weeds in mud.

Once your liquid tongue lapped my thirst,
and once you were waters that sang "Rejoice!"
as I heard the happy rippling gush of rapid sparkled diamond-streams
of
(everything is not what it seems.)
All is now in stagnant slime immersed.

And once just your smile was a welcome flood.
You sparkled,
my frantic, rejoicing rush.

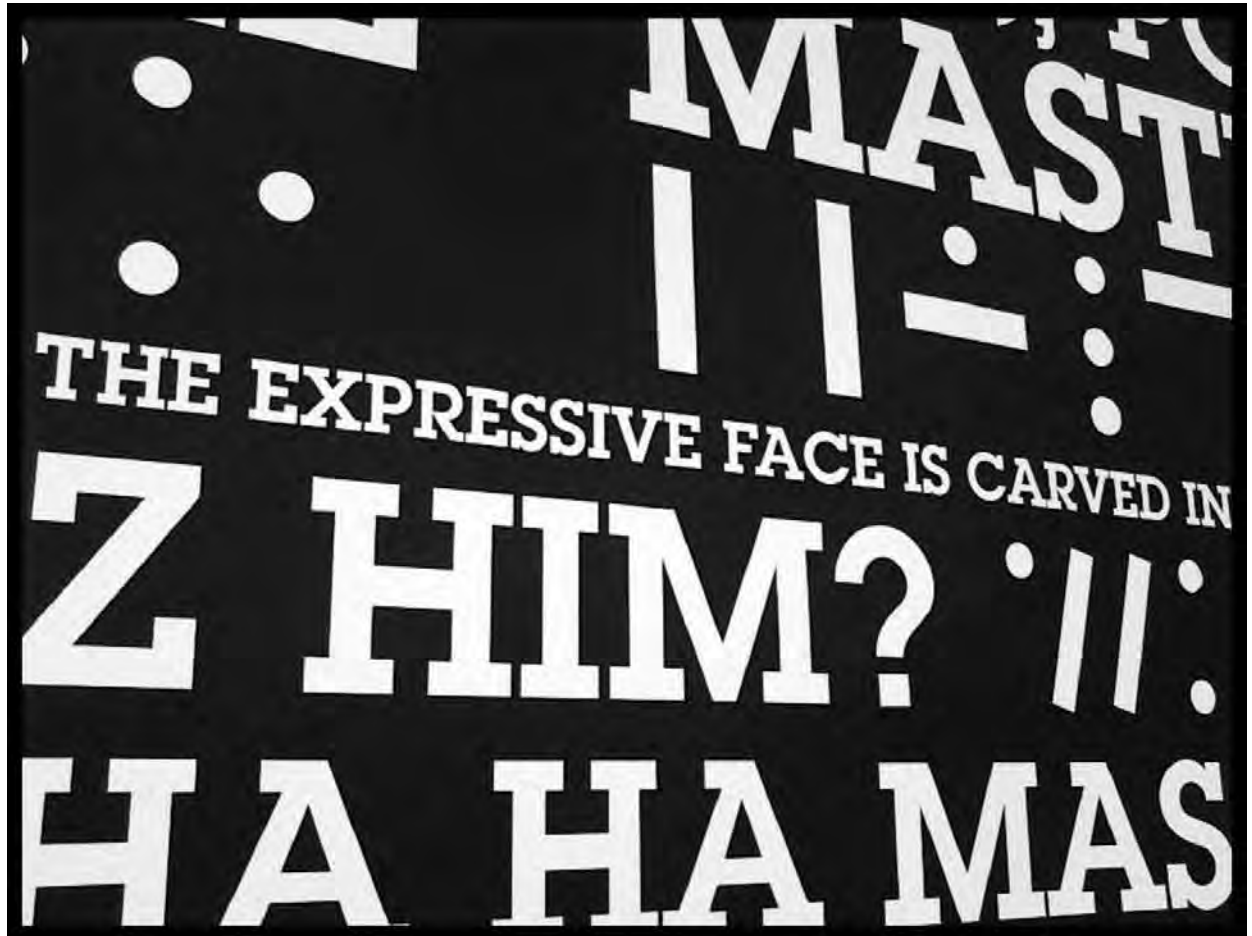
These weeks I stand on deafened banks on the darker side of murky choice
as inference trickles heavy
slow
like wasted time. Like blood.
Only slugs and bracken grow in weeds and slime and mud.

But once your liquid tongue laughed at thirst.

Where is your clean, cool voice?
—Seeped into root-rotted underbrush wherever our sweetest waters go.
You harden, a choked, forgotten hush in stagnant slime immersed.

These weeks are a sluggish river.
A silent witness.
My choice: to wait for your swollen corpse to burst
having washed out the echoes of your fresh voice
in the brackish water first.

* * * * *



Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor**The Way You Say My Name**

I love the way you caress me with my name, the way mothers and fathers
Caress and greet their children—with expectation that the world
Will meet, invite, envelop them.

I love the way you light my name like a marquee, when you sing it,
When you go neon, electric, on me. I love how you clasp our lips to it
Like a kitten pouncing on a moth.

I love how the syllables spring forth from your spark of intonation,
And linger in the air like Chinese lanterns. I love that you know me
In my name, like the first and last words spoken

Before the fall of the Tower of Babel; how the courage in your eyes meets mine,
Now hands follow, sudden grace embracing us, clutched around us—
I love the way you say my name.

* * *

Predators As They Grow Older

Men with owlish faces
 Squared behind rimless glasses
 Masquerade as studious,
 Or professorial.

Sartorial, they preen
 Against their own disembodied flesh—
 Body a wall more than a spark—
 They flash dully

To themselves, or hide
 Behind ritual. They pretend they have
 Never been to war, or foster home,
 Or prison.

Men whose owlish faces
 Belie the grip of suffering times
 Let the corners of their aging minds
 Grow rounded.

Faced with the wobble
 In themselves, the bobble in their souls,
 They look at you as prey, and then,
 Look away.

They forget, in this dissociative state,
 That they took you for a mate, in rage,
 Or tried to kill you, then
 Forgot you.

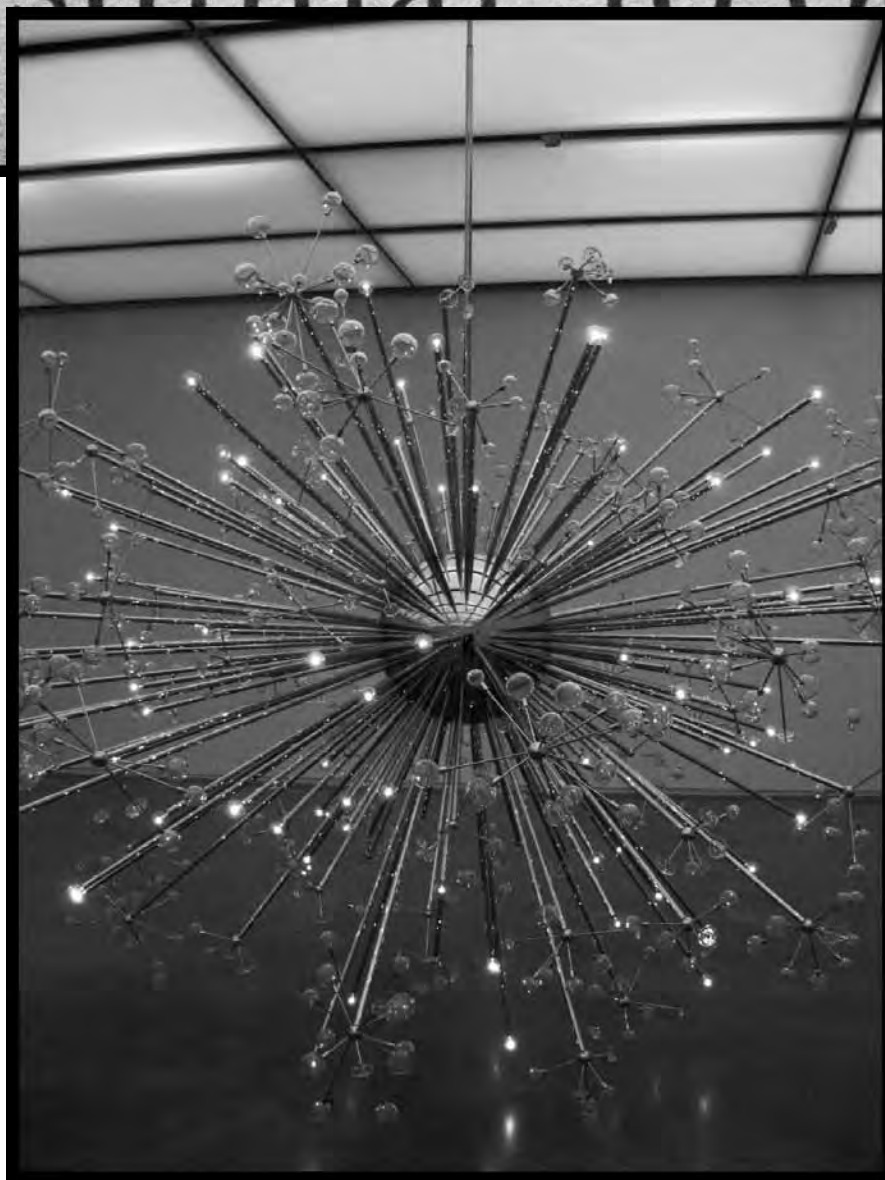
The owl in those faces knows
 The haunted places, the fits and skips of heart,
 The sawed off spaces in the brain
 Or hypothalamus.

It shows the kneaded bread-dough body
 Its origins, its tattoos, its scars. It reminds
 Of lost taboos, sins mortal and venial,
 Or menial.

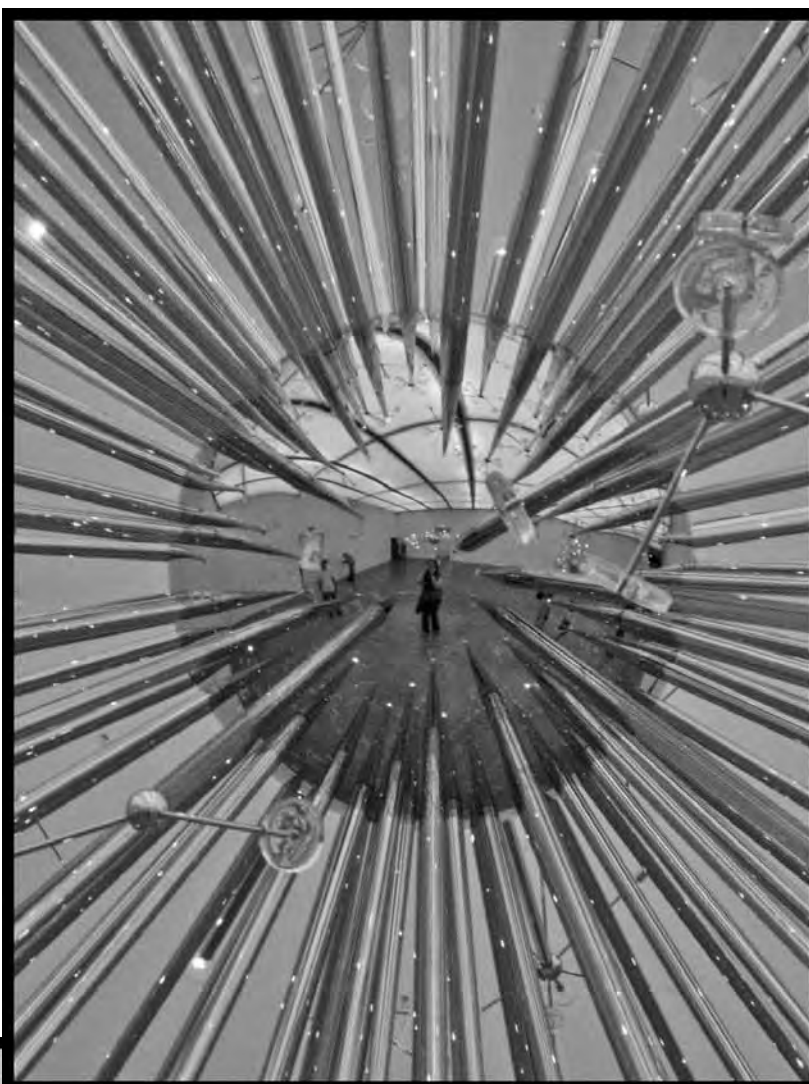
Behind the rimless glasses, the man with a
 Squared-off face replaces those searching owl eyes
 With a shallow look. Don't read in. This is all
 There is.

* * * * *

heliocentric
McElheny's s
similar to ou







the dense fog of electro-
million years after the
14 billion light years awa
res it is represented by
r's reflection at the cente



Charlie Beyer


Hustle-Work Stories

[Essay]

After the Australian with the mid-life crisis decided to sue me for my house, the American fantasy of owning one's own business was wrecked on the rocks of reality. The hovercraft I built him worked, but it didn't launch into space like Luke Skywalker's. My wife took it upon herself to settle out of court with me while I was in some flea-infested motel on the Oregon border. "Just to get this over with!" Her thoughtfulness committed me to six years of weighty debt of which she would have no part, and closed the doors to my struggling hovercraft business. "When the money fails to come in the door, love goes out the window," the old saying goes. I was booted out the door, told to mail the checks.

I got a temp job tramp surveying for a ballistic anal compulsive boss, who wasn't too bad compared to my wife. Job gave me plenty of fresh air and bad TV reception in run-down motel rooms. As fall fell upon me, work dried up and the panic to get a steady "real" job directed my every action, like trying to untie myself from the tracks, train whistle in the distance. While scanning the employment ads on the Internet, I found this to be an excellent time to also write an irrefutable feasibility report for investment in cornering the hovercraft industry. I spent hundreds of the wife's dollars in printing the impeccable report, and the associated long distance phone persuasions to the endowed. Then I saw an ad for investment capital, in a crack house neighborhood across the river from Portland.

Went to see the flim-flam man in Vancouver. He had on a cheap suit and a nose that's mashed over to one side. Always suspicious of the asymmetrical. Big promises of venture capital on the phone "Come on in. We got money today." I zoom down to Vancouver for a "meeting." It's a tiny front in a mini-mall tucked between a Kinko's and a Korean massage parlor. Lettering on the door says "Security Quick Title and Mortgage." Someone is in the process of scraping the name off so it says "... y Quick Title and Morg ..."

"Have some coffee," they say. The table a mess of splashes and empty creamer jars. Only cups are personal ones like "Willie's Mold Experiment in Progress" and "Welcome to Reno's Nugget Casino." All are slobbered on. I'll pass. There is a walled-off cubical with a window in one corner. A big fat guy is in there with his back to the window.

The nose guy says: "Come into my office." I walk past the cubical looking for his "office" and turn the corner into a narrow scum-smeared hallway filled with stolen bicycles. I back up into the cube. The fat guy immobile behind the desk, his face like a pie.

The nose talks fast: "Charlie, this business plan is the work of an engineer with a sales attitude. Investors don't want to see that. They want numbers. A clean financial statement with 1040 forms, projections, exact schedules ..." It's obvious he's not read a whit of the plan. He flashes me a crummy typing of the way it should be done, crookedly held together with a bent paper clip. Mine is bound with color pictures. Goes into his spiel about a \$2500 fee for putting together a high-test business plan with consultants. I tell him that there aren't two consultants

on the planet that know half of what I know about hovers. Goddamned waste of money. His hackles rise. Now he lunges for my pocket change. Says I can't leave until I start a corporation *right now*. Get out the checkbook and write him a \$500 check for the paperwork. Nobody is going to look at the plan without me being incorporated. Luckily, I drove down here on expired credit cards. Went around the block six times to avoid the meter. Nothing to shake down. The flesh mound says nothing. The hustler hammers on.

Somehow I break it off after an hour. We are beet red from me defending my few meager points and him flailing I *gotta* do this, I *gotta* do that. The pig eye still quiet (*stuffed?*). Where's the money we have today? I go outside and watch the nose chain smoke. A generic brand, "lights." Smells like moldering newspaper.

"How long ya been here?" I ask.

"Just moved in. Less than two weeks."

"Why Vancouver?"

"That's where the company sent me." He lies. Do I see a little tar and feather behind that left ear?

"So why don't you retire, lounge on the beach with all your dough?" I ask.

"Tried that. Had a successful investment consulting corporation in New York that was really bringing it in [*train station?*]. Decided to quit and take life easy. Traveled all over the world but wasn't interested in anything [*abject stupidity?*]. Just all these sights added up to be boring. Everywhere I went it was just more traveling and fancy dinners. Back in New York I just hung around the penthouse [*jail?*] eating all sorts of rich foods and doing nothing. Soon became really fat. And then, [*lowers his voice*] I lost all sexual urge for my wife [*she fat too?*]. Couldn't even get it up. So I had to go back to work. Started this little operation [*code for scam*] with my wife as executive secretary. We work all day meeting lots of interesting people [*pause for effect*] like you, and helping them turn their business around [*into his pocket*]. Like Dravis and Machelli just up the street had a liability on their books. We worked with them in their spent chemicals re-assigning company and had them with a fat bank account in two weeks [*took the Mob money, dumped the toxic waste in the river*]. Now we work till 6 when the wife goes home and takes a bubble bath [*in spent chemicals?*]. I do a little paperwork [*dumping*], then we go out dancing and have a late night romantic dinner. I'm 78 years old and never felt better in my life. This job is exciting and we're doing some fast enterprise turn around."

I turn around and leave. Next day I call and ask for his references and resume. Guy comes unglued. "I gave you that. What? You don't believe who I am? I worked in New York with the big boys. You go to Hell. You called me. Don't ever call here again!" OoooKay. He's too transparent to me. Me, a threat to him. A little smarter than his usual mark. What an asshole. Pretty fast racket though, sucking in the young and hopeful. They'll be moved on inside of a month.

So then I go to Bernard Hallcrane. Big ad in the paper. A little unclear but something about getting older professionals back to work. I now class as "older." All suits and swank office in downtown Portland. Elevator to second floor. Locked bathrooms. Turns out *not* to be a placement service for the disenfranchised, dubiously skilled megalomaniac, as I had hoped, but a finishing school for yuppie squared types with their underwear too tight. More than a few shuffling around, pinstripe coordinated, lots of handshakes and suaveness.

I wait on a flowery couch reading a Yup mag about being extinct in the workplace after 40. Nothing I wear matches down to the family tartan wool tie. Almost like a fishing scarf. A



MASS MoCa Series #6

totally gray skinny guy greets me warmly. Gray suit, gray hair, gray skin, the mummy? Thumbs my mining resume abstractedly. McGray says he did some mining investment fifteen years back when it was popular.

I said "How much?"

He says, "Eight hundred."

"Of course," I say, as if I knew what he was talking about. Eight hundred dollars buys ya a few gold pans and a few cheap motel rooms, eight hundred thousand buys the farm, eight hundred million buys Tanzania.

He likes my Indiana Jones no-bullshit approach. My resume reads like the adventures of Papillon on his third escape attempt. He gets me talking about hovercrafts (which I incidentally know a great deal about) and all pretenses of getting me into a tight collar shirt are dropped. I get him worked up on hovers. He tells me to come back on MLK day with some hover info. I show up three hours early. Look stupid. Have to sit in my car in the rain and smoke cheap cigars. Come back in at the right time, all frumpled, smelling like a community college ashtray. Clutching a pile of dot matrix printouts wrinkled with sweat and rain. Everything I ever knew and wrote about hovers is here, plans, specs, pics, the sink. He is gracious. Flops it all on the floor behind his desk. The trash can?

Back to business, he tells me that Hallcrane wants five grand to make me presentable, talk the talk, walk the walk. Average pay for acting like Gore: 75 Gs a year. I don't know . . . don't sound like all that much if ya gotta pack into the preshrunk underwear. Causes testicular cancer.

But the reason I came back . . . the reason I put all those quarters in the meter . . . the hope . . . the ever-present fantasy . . . hovercraft dollars!!! Fact is, dude thinks that hovers are swell, and he thinks his investment banker buddies will also. Because I don't fit the "squeak and sneak" model, wear my pants loose, these Daddy Warbucks will like the rough-and-tumble guy I am, unable to make my hair flat. Also, I can tell a story. This they like. Not the hound's-tooth sheen and the practiced words of a directed script, but the prattlings of a monomaniac with some pluck and a twisted gleam in the eye. Their existence is dry, formula, predictable, boring. They can live a wild side through me. All they gotta do is pay. OK with me. Should be enough amusement to go around.

Back home, the days dribble by. Wife pacing, maybe packing. No phone calls from McGray. I refine the 24-hour construction schedule for the 20 employees I do not have. Have to do the job walk.

Get two newspapers a day. Am a classifieds addict. The big city action, not the local stuff. Nowadays most applications done over the computer. Fax out the resumes. Email the resumes. Notice later that some word of the first sentence in the intro letter is always spelled stupid. "Enclosed is my resume for your impaction." No matter. The point is volume, not quality. Got a .002 response rate. Not quite as good as a chain letter. I send out to anything with a fax number or email. Queue up batches of twenty at a time for blasting out through the cyber pipeline. Like the North Vietnamese dropping propaganda leaflets on the US troops. Did they convert any?

First Monday in January. Forty degree gray drizzle. The party is inside though at the new state building employment office. The place is packed. All of Astoria has turned out. About fifty percent look hireable. The rest have some grave malformity. A few hundred extra pounds, an inability to talk, a scraggly junkie look. I help a few pathetics with the job search

computers. Only a few jobs listed under engineering and surveying. These are in places like Burns and Tillamook where Cousin Leroy already has the shoe-in. Never much hope for an outsider even if you wanted to move outside the space-time continuum.

I get up for a stretch and look at the miscellaneous on the billboard. “Welder wanted to assemble electric cars.” Well, ya know I’m a sucker, electric cars sound just about weird enough. So I run out to the job site and apply. Hell, it’s local. But what am I thinking, the pay is microscopic. More bad news. Now they love me and I got the fool job. They think I’m great even though I can’t weld a straight line. I dunno, maybe I’m not such a bad welder, but what the hell . . . ten bucks an hour! Can’t feed the pet fish for that. So I tell the guy I got plans to conquer the world. He’s worried about putting the training into me for this run of 70 ladder/work bench gizmos for GM. Yeah, three-hour training. Such an investment. I tell him I’ll make all his gizmos in two months. He says “Izza ho-kay deal den” in his thick Greek accent. Now 6 to 4:30. Buzzers for breaks, sparks, and banging all around.

“Reld! Reld! Reld!” The Greek shouts at us. His bug-eyed mantra, thinking it will speed us up. Grubby as a bum’s bed from my halo down, but better than going buggy bonkers around the house. Wife likes the fact that I’m suffering every day.

The gray industrial workers of the world are nice. Quiet. Haggard. Not the deceitful back-biting office rats I’ve been used to. Each has his depth in his pedestrian task, and a closet hobby at home. One old duffer is a kite freak. Yakked that up big. No one asks what I’m about. I don’t let them, couldn’t tell the truth anyway. I mean, it’s too weird, a slumming engineer.

So I weld in the corner of the vast blimp hanger. Through the smoke and gloom I can just about see the rafters sixty feet above me. A cacophony of screeches, booming, and grinding noises give the air a pummeling quality. My mind wanders to the construction of huge hovercrafts, my dream, all these minions scurrying to build *my* gizmo. In reality, I have ten deals simmering with millionaires, each poised over his check book. I’m calculating, calculating . . . looks like a storage area around here . . . maybe I should lease this half of the building?

The noon buzzer. Dash out to my car in the pounding rain. Go squealing out of the lot and down the road five miles to a phone booth. Thundering traffic going by. Some jerk idling a muffler-less jock truck nearby, reverberating the booth. Punch the thirty-seven numbers for the phone card.

“Hello, Mr. Stackmoney of International Jungle Adventures? Have you had a chance to review the material on the \$200,000 hovercraft you need? Oh . . . going before the board with it? That’s great!” Try to keep it short, but not impolite. Lunch break ticking. Zoom back to the factory. One red light will kill me. Cheese sandwich stuck in my throat. Can’t breath, peristaltic convulsions, doing corners on two wheels. Skid to a sideways stop. Back in the gloom dome when the return-to-work buzzer goes. I try to saunter with the rest, like I spent my half hour in the coma lunchroom as they did.

Steal another Sunday paper today while walking the dog. Dog getting neurotic. My zoophilic reflection. Am a chronic want ad junkie. Throw the news into a recycle bin, sure we’ll read it tomorrow. Tear into section F. Jobs.

Oh, yeah, here’s something. “Poultry insemination farm, Centralia. Turkey tickler needed.” This could be good. Not over three hours to commute. Stimulating work.

* * * * *



MASS MoCa Series #7

Tom Sheehan**Dowser on the River**

Downriver a sudden
wash spills grubs, white
worms, into the quick rush.

Stones, too, hurl
into the fray, like infantry
and horse soldiers out of bush.

The rain is gone
over-hill half a day
and aches its echo on the earth.

This, of course,
is my own war, this drive
to be alone, separatist seeking

shadows of the pine,
the cool, dark cells of old trees
flattening like choice rooms by the banks,

and the phantom foe
sleek as a jet under surface.
He turns to watch my boots stumble

on the rock skeltering
laced with lichen and mossed
strains. If he has laughter, it floats

away faint as photographs
at the back end of an old man's
mind. I trust that he neither laughs

nor cries in his world,
that once he noses upstream,
feels the power gauging his flanks,

knows the message
burning like new stars
in the sanctity where his eyes dwell,

he will forget why I
am in this shadowed recess:
that a secret spawning calls us both

from the center
of the earth, the rhythm's merge
divining where the river starts itself.

* * *

Right of Asylum

I tuck you in, woolled,
The last stray sardine
Into Norwegian tinning,
Housed and harbored

For one more night.
Your eyelashes never
Longer than this hour,
Or cheeks so berried.

The global streetlight,
Less dazzle than gleam,
Warm as a cup of honey,
Pales ingots on your face

And struggles for corners.
It fall short of hockey
Gloves at one more drying out,
a mitt tired of winter

And the long, still nights
Loosening the clutter of these days
Sounding their hard languages
Where debris daily piles up.

I marvel at the memories
Shared with this night;
Fifty years ago squinting
At my father's squinting at me,

The soft moon of his face
Leaping on my woolen landscape;
His breath heavy, warm, ripe,
Like a crock full of home made beer,

His hands clumsy at adjusting
Even the thinnest of my shrouds.
I often thought he let me know,
By such ruse, he attended darkness.

I should tug at you but I won't.
I'll accept the moon and silence
And your lying like a submarine,
Bottomed, only dreams inside.

* * *

Marching Orders

All summer the ants
 have staked their claim
 on the lionized maple tree.
 Undeterred, convoys lead in
 and out, around the clock it seems
 like a shift of atoms takes place
 or a stream of Redcaps
 empties the Silver Streak
 of its continental baggage.
 Some landlord at eviction
 would be ahead of the game if he
 paid by the hour or by the load, either
 way he'd be getting
 his money's worth on this contract,
 this resolute shifting of a universe.
 When they meet they must
 cheer each other on, hurrahing
 overloads and gargantuan accomplishments
 impossible by our
 standards. There are no
 shirkers or goldbrickers among them,
 just a slow, relentless
 sandblasting of maple interior,
 a quiet neutron shift of particles,
 that awful displacement
 only exercised otherwise
 by dry rot or maple fungus we've no name for.
 To spray them fatally
 just tries the tree again.
 And a hundred times it's been tried.

* * * * *



MASS MoCa Series #8



Martina Newberry



Christmas Music

. . . glowing like the metal on the edge of a knife.

—Meat Loaf

I think of that rock song when they talk about stars and stables and mangers.

How **Someone's** mother and working-class father told each other it would be all right—it would be fine.

After all, at home they'd always stuffed their pillows and sleeping mats with clean straw so this would be no different. The animals around them, watching . . . so what? Both had raised their share of animals—let the beasts watch; animals have concluded their own births and won't be bothered by human issue. They told each other “Don't worry,” and got ready for a long night.

She tried to pray, he stroked her ankles and bare feet with his scarred hands, noticed all the dents and ravines where his hammer had gone wrong or a nail skipped clear of its destination. All that cursing over construction of a table or bench seemed foolish now.

She scanned the animals' eyes, the floorboards, the folds of her husband's clothes for a sign. She knew birth was a natural thing—women always had done it—there was no need to be afraid, but she was afraid. God was supposed to be there so why all the pain?

The little girl from the inn tells her, “My mother says it always hurts but you will forget the pain.” **Someone's** mother doubts this. She has, since girlhood, longed for the fragile, precious things: soft cloth, finely ground wheat, thin-strapped sandals, but her life was not meant for fragility.

So, here she was and here was **Someone's** father who did not love her, but cherished her because God said he must. He would raise this child because he was a good Jew, a God-fearing Jew.

Maybe, he hoped, there would be other children—his own children. She sipped water from a wooden ladle, cried out for her own mother. Guests from the inn came out to look and confer.

Somebody's father told them to go away, to stop watching and whispering. *Looky Loos! Nosy parkers!* he thought. *Haven't they business of their own?*

Someone's mother moans and whimpers. Half in anger, half in pity, he shushes her: "Quiet, quiet now. God is here with you." She closed her eyes and breathed—waited. Almost as if it happened to another set of people in another place,

Somebody was born. The mother's voluted womb contracted, She laughed, hiccupped, missed nothing but God. Her *Son* was here! The cow chewed, bored with the smells; the horse turned his back.

The *Son* searched for the breast and slept and, in the quiet, his mother and father slept too. But, there was music: way above, lights shone out loud, vied for space, glowed like knife slashes in the black tarp of the sky.

Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

* * * * *



MASS MoCa Series #9

*WITHIN'S WITHIN: SCENES
FROM THE PSYCHEDELIC
REVOLUTION*

Music. Poetry. Rant. Mindfood.

turn on . . .

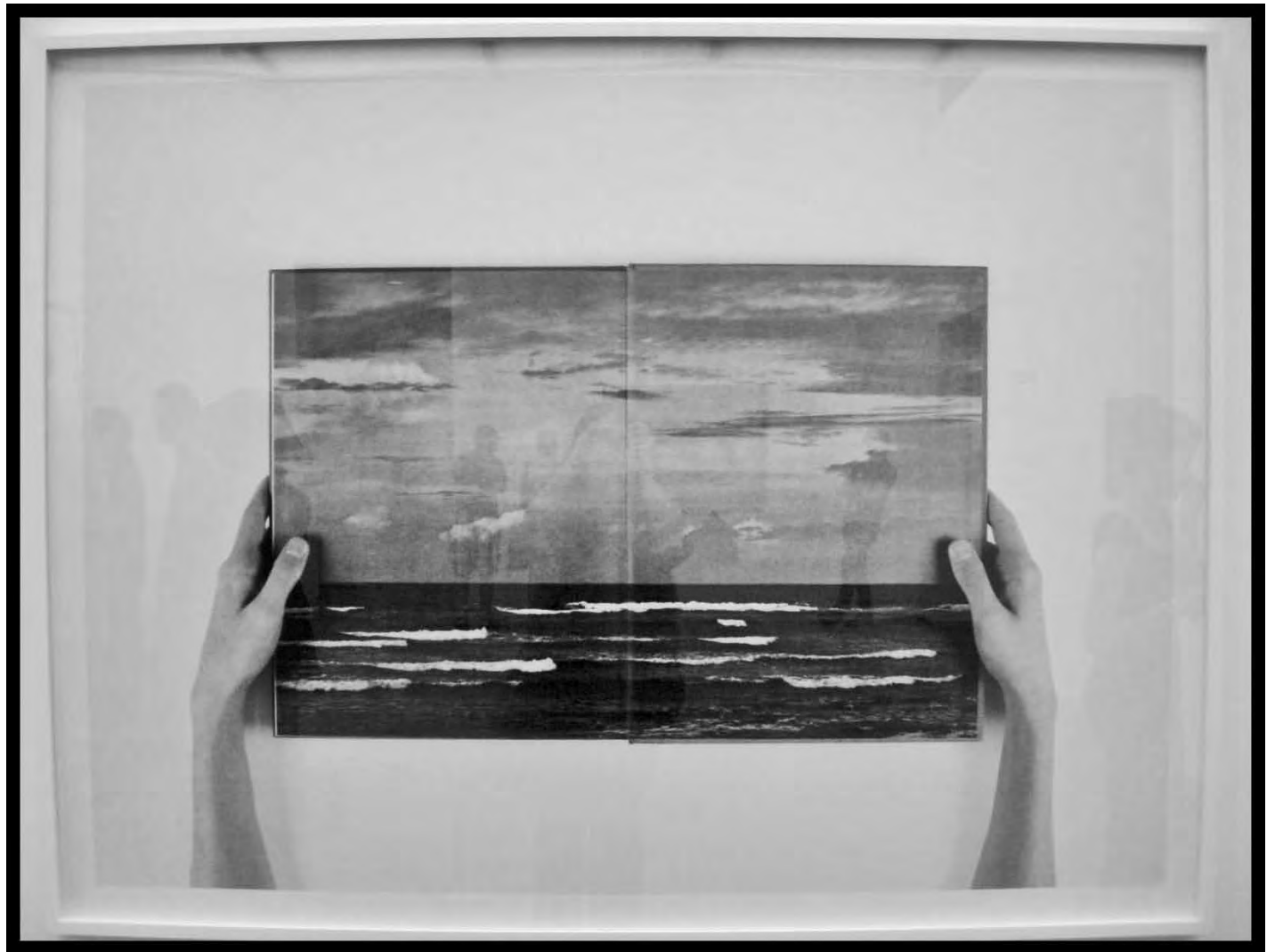
tune in . . .



On the Web: <http://www.spiritplantsradio.com>

Saturdays 11 am-2 pm Eastern US time

Repeats: Sundays 8 pm-11 pm Eastern US time



Raymond Soulard, Jr.



Labyrinthine

[a new fixtion]

Part Seven

"There is no final answer."
—Dr. Timothy Leary,
Radio Interview, 1986.

xxii.

The secret hustle in things is never stop moving, *you can't, you must, you try*—& yet—

There is the temple.
There is full moonlight.
I chose the temple to look at the moonlight & listen.

Yes. Hmm. The Beast is close some nights, breathing through that moonlight, yes. Hmm. This book about the Beast, this book is a beast, I know it live over time, it grows page by page, I wonder at it—

it exists because I am—because I exist how I have & do—some other person, some other book—or not a book at all—

Never stop moving, the secret hustle in things, I believe this because I see unmoving people all around—the long years dull, explain less & less, sentiment develops a sweet taste, a reward for letting a little, & a little more—

I can't I won't I keep moving—
sometimes it's no better than a blind crying lurch one way & another—but do, but must—

xxiii.

(He would come to the room to compose his letters to her, the room he'd helped design, not that he'd intended or wanted, but it was very important to them that he compose his letters to her in that room, that when she held each letter in her hand during her afternoon bath, it had been composed in that room, that room was the contained place of imaginal space, unshaped, undetermined, these elemental beings had long been with him, he'd thought them special friends upon that time, they would watch with him how light touched rain puddles, explained in his mind, without speaking, words just for him, how things were so, but between those hours & now he noticed the discontinuousness of emotional phenomena & he hesitated, & they pushed him, these elemental beings that had been his friends, now there was duty in it, obligation, they

wanted from him, & then came that night of total darkness, when what sang the world assaulted his heart, & what all had mattered passed, & he opened out to the rest & so the elemental beings were more a nod to his will & when invited to write his letters in that room it was privilege he granted, because he understood what she was & how he could help, & what gain from it—

(He liberated her, saved & eventually liberated her, with his songs, & he also kept a piece in Cloverdale when she left, when Maya sent Christina running down the road, he kept a piece

(So you ask me about this room tonight & what it's for & I'll tell you it is a place where all but one pass through, but the one he stays, stays always & I know she's back in Cloverdale to free the rest of her & it will not come easy

(There were red candles when I composed to her, there was a wall I turned glass to watch the sea, there was the scratch of my pen on thick paper that sucked its ink blood greedy, there was the stiff back of my chair, painful as I slowly composed, slowly until I had broken each song open & then the room would shake, tip, I would bring you to me there—)

xxiv.

(& the woods, too, Christina, **those** woods, my songs were composed from my hours or years spent there, where I went, where I was led, did I bring back songs or just my voice able to sing them? I'm asking but I never knew, or do not recall

(It's simple. He will deliver you to me. He thinks more, you think more, but you are wrong. There is cost to all this. **Do you understand, Xtina?**)

Among the pine
into the woods
I played the song that lured me on.

Do you understand?)

Christina thrashes hard & bites Kinley's shoulder so hard he chokes a scream. He is awake, disoriented to the sight of the nude Christina in this bed & the other one, also nude, also clinging to him now—

xxv.

Strum the cosmos & make something new. Down among the strings, the arguments for harmony get deep & many worlds will go. I can see how this happens.

Which is to say this: some argue that this world's existence is proof of divine intent while others say only evolution could be the explanation.

And I say it's music. I say so because so many songs & each created live on the stage every hour & how songs are perfect & yet & yet—they twine, talk back & forth, lead back to the last, onto the next—

"Have a drink, brother,"

"No thanks."

"It'll dull the pain. And the boredom."

"Boredom?"

"Yah the in-between hours."

"There aren't really any of those."

"Yah. Sure."

"I'll get you another drink & tell you a story."

Nods. I'm sitting at my seat at Luna T's Cafe's bar, Rebecca's is empty. He's looking at me steady as Mr. Bob draws him another draught. His baseball cap says **Occupy** & shows a devilish looking figure. His hair dark & stringy from it. His eyes a solid blue, like a brick of blue. He's young, a working man but young. A hulk in denim & cotton. Nods again.

"When the fat man with the blue doll who looked like him said it, of course nobody listened. He held his street corner day after day, & he warned & warned, but nothing to it."

"Said what?"

"About the ships overhead, they came in late summer, silently. He tried to explain but no, something else."

"What else?"

"Just listen. He was trying to explain, he'd say, 'What if you are right? What if the Universe had been created by men? What if they'd been growing you for resource? What if the doubt slivered into consciousness, & its furious terror of death, could have been removed by pulling off your pinkie nail & bleeding through to original programming, what life was before we were marked for cultivation?'"

"And?"

"It's when I realized about all this. The ships overhead."

He drinks. Considers.

"You're the author."

"One of them."

"The *main* one."

I nod.

"Ships overhead."

"Always been there."

"What's that mean?"

"It means we're not from here, we're not alone, & a lot more's going on than seems."

He nods. "I can accept that."

"Good."

"And?"

"I suppose this book is even more fucking weird for this premise."

He laughs. Drinks again. "Plenty of weird books out there."

I nod.

"But this one holds its own."

"Thanks."

"Sure."

"Still bored."

"Later."

"Ahh."

xxvi.

Now we're both awake. I swear, Gretta is way too pretty for being twice my age. No wonder Bowie can't—

She likes hash as much as sex. I can see that. Hot old hippy chick musician.

"So what is it, a cult?"

I shake my head. She smokes me down & way more. I'm halfway between jumping her bones again & falling asleep.

She had the weirdest looking bong, it's like an orgy of bodies but it's hard to figure out some of whose parts are whose.

"What then?"

"It's all about being ready for the ships."

"UFOs?"

I nod.

She considers. "Ready how?"

"Well, most of everybody isn't going to make it."

"Make it?"

"Yah." I don't like talking about this.

"So you took Bowie there."

I nod.

"Bowie?" she starts to laugh.

"Well, yah, it was stupid."

She looks at me plain. "You were planning on leaving with him from the start, weren't you?"

I start to say no, then yes, then I stop.

"It's not easy to explain all this."

Gretta looks hard at me. "This matters. You're Bowie's, you won him, that means you're mine too. We wouldn't be sitting here sticky with each other otherwise."

I nod. "I was being groomed to be leader."

She nods. Yes, & nods go on.

"I'm not sure how it happened, like why me. And I didn't even know right away."

She smokes & listens. I hate this now.

"They didn't, um, orient me like the rest."

"Sex."

I nod. "I mean that's just how it works for everyone. It's almost nice, that there's no pressure like in the rest of the world."

She looks at me with no opinion. "But not you."

"No. I mean I figured something was weird by when they paired me with my friend Oliver."

"Why?"

"He's gay. I mean he loves me but not like that. Usually they get you ready by who they send you out with. You're not . . . allowed . . . to do anything. But you have to get used to being with a guy while you're traveling. I think it helps." I sound fucking lame.

"But you traveled with the gay boy."

"Yah, I think we were made friends on purpose."

She nods.

"I love him. I, um, made it so they didn't, you know—"

She stares.

"Anyway. I didn't have a say in all of this. And Bowie didn't know when we met him in Seattle."

"So you brought him back."

"Well, I did. Oliver stayed in Seattle."

Gretta smiles like some joke. "How long till he fucked you."

I flinch. I shouldn't but sometimes I feel like they know things I don't. Like being naked isn't enough.

"Not long."

"And that messed things up?"

"No. Not for me." I take a chance here. "I didn't know about you . . . and him. But I'm good

with all of us like this. I think he can help. I mean, I would rather help you & him when it happens. Of course."

"The ships?"

"Yah."

"When?"

"I don't know. When is he coming back?"

"Bowie?"

I nod. Figuring I won't like whatever she says.

"Bowie doesn't live here. He doesn't live anywhere."

"But he won't forget us?" I sound as stupid as possible.

She leans forward, cups my breast, gropes me a little. Takes my hand & does the same for her.

Whispers.

"Would you forget all this girly goodness if you were a half-psychotic spook?"

I smile, ready, but she just puts out the lights & holds me till she sleeps. No, Gretta, he's not going to forget you. I'm not so sure I'm not in the "one more" category, but he's sure not forgetting you.

xxvii.

"Help me, Universe, help me make good, help me make this Universe good—I do not give up—I do not slumber. I will feel no matter the roar of hurt, I promise, in dirtiest, worst hours I promise," Global Wall near blindly potts down the radio as he cums into her, he does not at this moment know which one, or if one at all, she seems twisted with him, flawless as he drives deeper as he keeps on fucking cumming it does not seem possible the failure of his years blows wide, bursts like a star's exploding heart, he seems to feel the curved small of a back, the breath both rhythmic & discontinuous to his, the moan his & not his own, the eyes beyond thought, beyond what & possible, he drives even deeper because *he should have & should have & should have, he cries, should have then, cries for then, should have then, & he puts up the volume slightly again to say in rhythm with his cock driving this raw pussy, "everything matters, grind this world true, everything matters, grind this world true, **everything matters**, grind this world true*—

xxviii.

"I'm from the sea"

"Maya"

"Tell me, Samantha." I use her own name for emphasis, three whistles, hard & soft breaths.

"In a way."

We are by the sea, the day I met her, I think of it as neutral ground, close to the sea but not in it, not of it—

"Is that where you are now?"

"I've never left it, Maya. I never do."

"How did I?"

"I don't know. You're different. You always were."

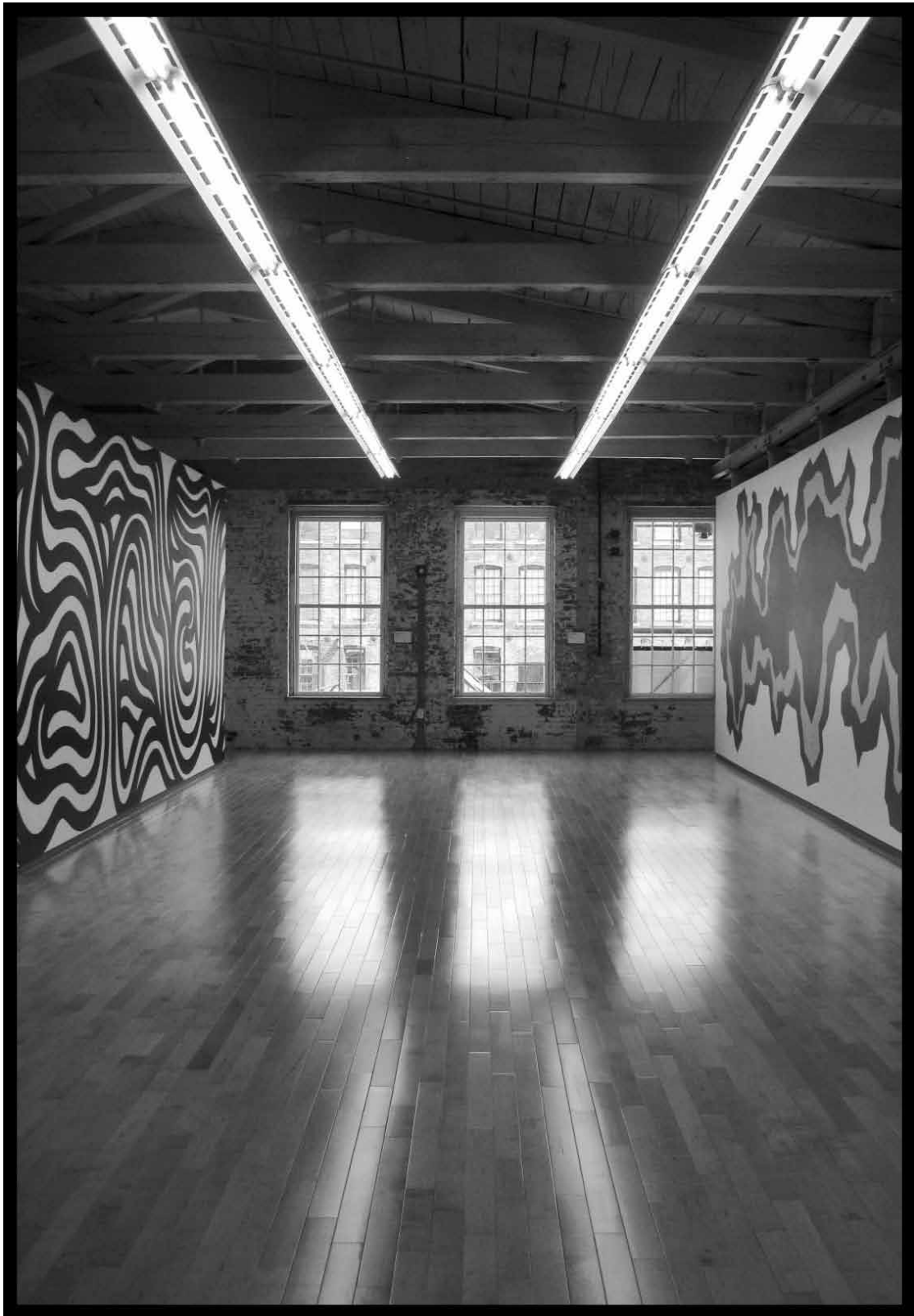
"You mean for a purpose?"

Samantha says nothing.

"Why am I with Christina & Kinley?"

Still nothing.

"Is Dean with you?"



MASS MoCa Series #10

The shore fades & folds & undoes until she is in a bed with those two. Nude. *Oh*.
 She rolls out & scrounges for clothes.
 “It’s OK. Maya. Come back.”
 “Nothing happened.”
 “I’m not even sure.”
 She looks at them. Feels no fear from them. Only curiosity.
 Starts to explain. I can’t. I haven’t. I don’t want to.
 “Dylan,” she says, finally.
 Christina nods.

xxix.

There is shift among worlds, finally, Charlie Pigeonfoot is present & doing what he can.
 Nothing has been right since that night, what happened at that theatre, seeing **RemoteLand**,
 the whole thing.
 That theatre, this theatre, the Nada Theatre, opened again in the Hotel Noah, o great grand
 theatre, is it the same?
 “Is it really important, Charlie? Is it really so important?” asks the Gate-Keeper.
 Ah, yes. A film with a Gate-Keeper. No wonder.
 Those two boys too. They don’t look well, sitting in the back row, dozing & mumbling, ah well,
 he’ll keep an eye, they don’t have to leave—
 And the girl who came early too, the Gate-Keeper had let her in, nodded at Charlie, it was
 OK—
 But it wasn’t. It really wasn’t. Retreated far from her as he could, cup, checker, housefly, comic.
Curvilinear Comix #2, still haven’t found the first.
 No. Shit. Same freckles. Same short skirt. But no. But she was sitting with those boys.
Calm, Charlie. Calm.

Looks at the Gate-Keeper who looks back at him. “Remember: you disbelieve in nothing.” Laughs
 twisted. “Show’s about to start, Charlie. Take a seat. Wherever.”

Charlie, for a passing moment, tries to reassemble. Has he never left. Been in this theatre all along? And
 those two boys? And that girl?

As the Gate-Keeper says, the lights go down. There is a shift among worlds. Things near. She nears.
 Worse, he wants to paint again.

xxx.

“You can tie me up too. I don’t mind.”
 “There’s a room in back. They’re not using it.”
 “Come on, Charlie, take my hand.”
 “It’s part of the film now, Charlie.”
 She laughs.
 “I’m your new blood canvas, Charlie.”

xxxi.

I nod at the Author, or at least the one with the notebook & the stare in my direction. I'll tell this one for now. He nods.

We are sitting where I sat waiting for you. The club. Luna T's. Not at the bar, the other room with the stage. It's dark, nobody is playing.

"Tell me how, Preacher."

"How."

"And why."

He stares at me, dazed.

"Look at me."

He blurs.

"*Look at me.*"

He looks, face down to chest, oh yes, the dress I'm in.

"I wore it for you."

"You're lovely."

I ignore everything these words might have ever made me feel. It's hard. Or maybe it's wet. I'm tired of being distracted.

"Dreamland."

He coheres. Nods.

"How. And why?"

"You saw me dancing at the Ampitheatre."

"Yes."

"You talked to me."

"Yes."

"I died that night. I danced & I died."

I listen.

"But I didn't die. Something else happened."

"What?"

"Him. Benny. He happened."

I listen.

"He crossed my path. Stayed me."

"Stayed?"

"He showed me Dreamland."

"You never told me this."

"He didn't want me to. The night you waited for me here, I didn't come. I was going there, & not coming back."

"How. And why?"

"I was ready. And the chance was closing. It's complicated."

"And yet here we are."

He nods, looks at my chest with an unhappy lust. Unusual combination in men I dress for like this.

"You want me to go with you, Preacher? Is that it?"

"What else?" I nearly jump as I recall Tweety Bird in my lap & she fucking talks.

"Yes, Genny. It was always you. I cannot do this without you. I need you to come with me."

"And Tweety Bird?"

"She's how we get there."

Tweet smiles up at me, more animate than ever.

"Fucking finally," she smirks.

xxxii.

I carry Penelope in my arms back up to the Bridge of Glass. She is awake, aware of me, her arms holding on to me. This is what I have to do. I had to walk us awhile to find a way back to it, & I think Benny helped me too.

"Jack."

I say nothing. Just walk & carry.

"Jack."

Benny reveals a set of glass steps back up to the Bridge. I carry Penelope in silence.

"Jack!"

On the Bridge, I settle her down for a moment.

She holds my face to hers, close. If this was possible—

"Jack, I'm with you."

"I don't know what that means, Penny."

"It means I love you. I came for you."

I know that look. It's the soft vague one that means she wants sex. Usually—

She reaches for me & I move into her embrace.

"I have only one question," she whispers wetly near my ear.

I nod.

"Me or Christina?"

I nod & with no pause, say: "Both."

She doesn't flinch. She whispers back: "Good."

xxxiii.

Labyrinthine, how delicious, how pur, how undulate, how softest red wings & green gobs of melody—

& the question, deep if not all: asked again: ask again

***when will you learn to arrive
at this hour?***

Well, maybe not this hour, no. I'm arrived. I'm here, this night cafe, the braid of voices in my head, on the page, how they float free about me—

fine ass & tryptamines, like the many years—

the lights, the drizzle, the great miracle of doubt, the greater one of music—

Farther back, & farther ahead, & tonight I can reach forward & back both, I can feel the way things connect, not the same but they do connect—

Jim Reality, now stardust, now recomposed in Wytner, at Luna T's, playing guitar forever, doing the Great Work forever, I hear his voice always

*We've got a Reservoir of Love
It's all that I'm thinking of
We've got a Reservoir of Dreams
All is not as it seems*

Reservoir of Love, Reservoir of Dreams
All is not as it seems

*Labyrinthine, how delicious, how pur, I am writing in a faith that is old in me, that I persist to renew & follow, deeper path in me than all others, the music in pages, how I best tell the years, how I best walk my years, not to understand simply **but to understand with hope**—*

xxxiv.

Yes, this ragged sheaf of high notes, yes, nothing learned yet but strategy to keep singing, keep singing & so I try, I put this black ink stick to its page & push it along, to understand with hope, & I do, & I don't & I do—

This world is not ours—we belong to it—& yet not enough in saying that—the ships have always been overhead—do I believe this or just write it, or has one led toward the other?

Every shift contacts every other shift—again, my own words seduce me by their weird play into belief—it's true, or it sounds like it should be true—like a sexy little truth with a pouty mouth & a skirt conforming precisely to her hot little ass—

Would knowing even help? Would it justify or disappoint? It seems like the civilizations of men flourish with the clash of arguments, the wild flourish of mysteries—

certainty brings corrosion—

*What comes can be the strength of accumulating years, that's what I carry by way of current faith, I think: because I have done this many ways over many years, what opens out to me is **further along**, as though a path, as though there is not loss or diminish but gain—*

I would will my daylight hours root from an hour such as this—I would wish its branchy truths, its far lights, its ceaseless unfoldings, its nearness to dreaming—

xxxv.

There are countless beauties in the world, & passing in & out, & I wonder them against the veiled maps moved by men enamored not of beauties but of power, to have, to own, to distribute, to influence, to cause, to gestate, to destroy—

Have you found a way to the other side & back, one most do not know? A machine, a concoction, a twisted reveal deep inside the mind? How will you breach it finally to allow return?

Does it comfort you to live on in amassed numbers & cut granite? I don't think so. I think any wild enough to move the mass of men one way & another would not willing give back this power. Control, mighty control twists your mind but not toward a path of light there & back—

I think you'd see the mass of men as stupid, running pig-nosy in tiny pens, dying & burying in the haze, yet—

the beauties of the world countless, & passing in & out—there is that, countless, at every hour, disrupts the veiled maps, floating, crying, a color passing a mirror, a melody colliding with an empty night's street & the wild sparks thereof—

xxxvi.

Global Wall is up well before dawn & on the move again, he has sniffed from deepest in his dreams that it's time to go. They are asleep, curled & nude, in the other bed, that's OK, he leaves the motel room & walks out to their car, to sit & think.

Well, first is a different car. Soon. And maybe more change.

He's not exactly sure of anything. Is he sick? Does he ever see the daylight? What are they to him at this point? Each seems to possess him in a different way—

The previous night, in the locked radio station, all three of them, they covered him with eyes & lips & soft bodies, it was impossible to untangle like they were all fucking him at once as he also spoke clearly, softly, steadily into the microphone—

“World hard from the groin & nothing rhymes with the moon. I keep asking on nights hard with sinews of want, keep asking when the soft word, the softer touch, my response in crazy blood howls, what rhymes with moon?”

One emerges from these three, but which? Her slender thighs as she rides him, as he thrusts in & in deeper & in still deeper, she licks her lips & smiles & grinds more . . . poetically? His mind blinds, yet he speaks on—

“In the shift of lights, a few years of men among the dozens boys, the mass willing to live by more glare but less heat, accede what the selfish gods of men demand, whatever rhymes beneath the moon. I ask hard from the groin, unaccepting the control or the chaos, what rhymes with you, moon?”

Her face shifts, among the three, the pressure of her hips & torso on him a little more, a little less, her breathing, the way she leans forward or back as he drives & drives, he tries something to break this, this murk, this loss of—something—but she exerts again, she licks her lips & glows wide-eyed at him & bucks & pulls at him inside her, squeezes, harder, he cries, cringes, talks on

“By the nights of mad vision when too much felt, the world of men both vicious & dull, the content is still found in singing discontent”—the words waking him—“the content is still found in singing discontent”—& he twists—& she slips her hold—“the content is still found in singing discontent”—she is wide-eyed beneath him, feeling his heavy hands upon her, his recovering power—“singing discontent”—he drives to divide her at the root—“nothing rhymes with moon, nothing good rhymes with moon”—now she cries out, cums & wails both—“Or, worse to it, everything rhymes with moon & I am years past being bluster & man enough to say it plain”—she is kneeling between his legs now—licking & sucking & crying & his again, all of them *his* again—

The old man who comes in around 5 am if they stay that long—not a DJ, or a host—simply there to run the advertisements till the morning news—remedies for skin—& flatulence—& time itself—

They are quiet when he wakes them, tells them to clean it all spotless, he is waiting in the car—under an hour—maybe pancakes for breakfast later—

xxxvii.

Start with the curious creeping eye in the night, the darker fantasies he carries, are they pleasures, or wild bolts of consciousness, toward what might salve, what might explain—

But more, always more to it, & I address you for reply now

“What rhymes with the moon?”

“Art”

“What slips freely through the hours?”

“Art”

“What flows between limbs?”

“Art”

“What touches deep & lasts?”

“Art”

“What builds from sleep?”

“Art”

“Tell me”

“There’s Art, there’s hunger, there’s exhaust”

“Tell me”

“What this broad view gestures”

“From, to, Art”

“What now seen toward, that distant rock from this nearly drown”

“Art”

“What sings nearer is Art, sings nearer, a hand, a blind eye, a voice of leaves, a white tree”

“Lay with me, white tree”

“What do I want?”

“You want Art”

“What do I want?”

“You want Art”

“What do I want?”

“To rhyme with the moon”

“What must I do”

“Rhyme better with the moon”

“What rhymes with the moon is Art”

“What wakes me to my bed & limbs is Art”

“What again walks me among clouds & men is Art”

Jasmine looks at me from the other bed. I have not touched her over there, a promise the easier to keep by whatever witchcraft got me this far. When she came out of the hotel room’s bathroom in a blue tissue & panties, I felt my groin light up, unhappily. They’ve got a lockdown on me. She’s still not all there & seems a little sorry I don’t at least make a play—

Then she starts all that chanting with herself in different voices, & I think she’s crying for real, & I feel bad for her, but not enough to risk it—I let her cry & chant & I keep my face to the wall because the voodoo swelling my cock could just—fucking——

xxxviii.

I am labyrinthine you walk through me, years to this & there is still tonight the secrets told in a sniff, & what wealth passes by every night, I am the labyrinthine you walk through me & this book weighs pounds where once weight pages I don’t have answers for what it is yet I realized something this week

the clearing shaped like a temple in full moonlight, that temple is an ancient temple of dreams, it exists

now, here, tonight, it is temple & portal & tool all at once, & I did not know this before, & it seems important to know, like an image has become a functional place, how it explains itself, of course a temple of dreams would resonate powerful but have no literal substance—

I am labyrinthine you walk through me, this means different over time, through space, it's why I keep circling back, returning, writing old words to see how they feel now to write again—

xxxix.

"Why did you come with me, with us?"

"Why?"

"Yes, Bowie, I'm asking."

"It was a trick. A little one."

"Tell me."

"The dream I told you about when we met. Remember."

"I remember everything you say to me, Bowie."

"What did I say?"

"You said you had a dream that was still bothering you, like it had a message."

"Go on."

"You said you were with your relatives, many of them, on a happy wedding day. It could have gone badly, but it didn't. You said everyone was relieved how it had turned out."

"What else?"

"That's it."

"I thought you remembered all my words, Christa."

"I do. *Shit*. OK. You said 'weddings are good days.'"

"You do remember."

"I told you."

"Do you know why you didn't remember that bit right away?"

"Why?"

"I was looking into you."

"Into."

"Yes. A hypnosis, sort of. Not so easy to describe."

"And what did you find out?"

"It's OK. I wasn't undressing you."

"Not that I'd mind."

"No. But still. Think of it more as a look into your files. Why you were there, your intentions."

"And what did you find out?"

"That there are things you don't know either. Gaps. Questions."

"So that's why you came?"

"I came because I am one of the gaps."

"Meaning?"

"They figured me, a sort of gap shaped like me. I would come & you would leave with me for awhile."

"And then?"

"You'd return, I guess."

"Guess? Since when do you guess?"

"They were guessing. Hoping, really."

"Like what? I'd get you out of my system?"

"Sort of. Maybe more like recognize & embrace your role."



"Like a king."

"I don't know. Yes."

"What, Bowie?"

"I don't know, Christa."

Silence.

"I don't either."

"That's fair."

"But I know something too."

"What?"

She rolls hard into his arms & pins him tight. "I am never, ever letting you go. Ever."

Nod in the dim. "Didn't think so."

xl.

Yes, in truth, grasped by two women, I was lucky enough to show up when they were both naked, in bed, sort of twisted up together, I just sorta slinked in, re-upped Gretta's hash pipe, just in case, a sort of good will gesture toward hoped for nookie to come—

Or at least some cuddling. I mean I could sniff all the fun they'd been having, waiting for my late & sorry ass, gotten bored, I understand, pass the time—

They take turns—then I do—

Preacher always says a meal's better shared with a friend—

xli.

Finally Christa asks, I wonder how it took so long, & she probably didn't want to.

"How did you two get together?"

Gretta laughs, smokes more. Leaves it to me.

"I don't know how intentional it was."

"Or not."

"I just went to all your shows."

Gretta laughs. "You and the hippy kids."

"I didn't have any together ideas about music. I just liked what I heard when your band played at Luna T's."

"Yah, that's our weird home."

"It always felt like you were doing something with the music. I'm not good at understanding these things."

"Alien conspiracies, secret governments, forests that can't burn down & contain secrets to time itself, sure. Music, nah." She laughs again.

Christa is restless. She knows she's smart, smarter than most, but these two make her doubt, they seem to talk 10 words for one, or something way more stupidly complex than that.

"Tell me."

For awhile, they don't, hear the stress, so Bowie goes high, to her lips, shoulders, breasts, & Gretta buries softly in her cunt, tongue moving impossibly fast & slow almost simultaneously—

Eventually they draw her though stress to craze to cum to calm, & all share the hash again—

"Some of it was just loneliness, Christa. He'd be at the bar till closing. Chuck liked him, I think sometimes they'd lock the doors at 2 & stay longer.

"But it was more. He said to me once, between sets, wanna hear a good joke?

"I nodded, I liked his smell. Not dirty, but salty."

Bowie laughs, that's rare, it's lovely. Christa wants them tasting her all over again but stifles her

spasm.

"I was in this northern city, it was springtime, & one of the mystics approached me with the truth.

"I backed away. He smiles & nods. 'When you're ready,' he says.

"I wasn't there for pleasure. Really not. I had to take someone in, that night, & it would be sad.

"He walked with me awhile, I was OK with that. I'd been on this street many times lately, everything still open past midnight when I'd go to see her, the old barbershop, Afghani restaurant, some art galleries. I'd show up at her door after midnight.

"I was near & looked at him. I nodded, smiled. He moves near, touches my shoulder. Points.

"Where?"

"There"

"Where?"

"There too"

"Then he does a little dance. Nods again."

"That's it?"

"What else?"

"I wasn't in front of it, but he pushed me toward her door anyway. Knew, or seemed to."

"She'd come to her door in a slip. She had pink ones, white, blue. Blonde hair down. That waiting smile."

"We'd sit & have something to drink first. She would smoke a cigarette. One. Told me it kept her honest. Then we would get on her bed, slip off, me from behind & fuck, hard, awhile, then slower, then sort of collapse in sleep.

"She had a beautiful ass. She was thin but her ass was full. She seemed proud of it."

Gretta looked at me after listening so long. "What's the joke in this?"

"When I came that night, I didn't pull out. I cuffed her & held myself hard in her until the door opened."

Gretta nodded.

"She never said a word. They let her dress. She went along agreeably."

Gretta finished her half-glass of red wine, all she allowed herself during shows. Nodded.

"What did she do?"

"She'd killed over & over. She was good. Subtle."

"Why not you?"

"I wasn't work. She was a good soldier."

Christa listens, dazzled by this, & unsure. This time they just twine with her, close, sweet.

"It took us a long time to get here, Christa."

She nods. Wants to return with them both now.

xlii.

Bowie now turns to me & I feel that look of his that undoes me.

"Thing is, before I met you, I hadn't seen Gretta in a long while, & I was hurting. And then I met you, & it's like you were what we were missing."

Gretta nods in the dark.

"Pretend I don't get it & tell me."

"Really?"

She nods. Feels stupid. Feels sorry.

Gretta starts to hum & at first Christa resists. This is how she explains things.

Tries to resist but really doesn't. They explain, tell stories but in the end Christa trusts a feeling she has had deep in her belly. She's heard people talk about that kind of thing but yes, with her it's true.

That feeling tells her how she's feeling, what's coming, what's been.

I feel like we'll never really leave this bed, like we've been arriving here all of our lives & here is where we are.

And I know that's foolish.

But if they could feel this, feel what I am feeling, with them, if I could teach, show them, I want to, I think.

Was the gap shaped like you both? Can I do this with you?

xliii.

Maya looks dissatisfied, Christina thinks. She's sleeping but it's an unhappy look on her face.

They got a room with two beds, this struck her as funny. This is Clover-dale, which is not a what or a where but something else, & yet they get tired, it gets late, they find a low-budget hotel. Does the guy behind the counter give Kinley a look for the two pretty girls he's checking in with? Kinley doesn't notice. *Ha.*

I slept in Kinley's arms, & we did nothing. Less than that. Kinley is uncertain & he doesn't react well to it. Especially with me along.

He's not afraid for Maya. Not in the least. I try to suss it. She's cute. She sniffs young & lost. A sort of pretty scrawny pup. Another man—

would not be Kinley. He is disturbed she lost her friends. Clover-dale spooks him.

I speak quietly.

"She looks unhappy."

Kinley nods.

"Do you know what we're supposed to do? Here, with her?"

"Everything led me here, Christina, nothing told me what to do here."

I nod inwardly. OK. "I don't think she knows either."

Now Kinley hugs me. One of those loving ones of his that makes me hotter than anything else.

But still.

"Getting here was a lot of it. I didn't want directions anyway."

I am quiet.

"What I wanted was to arrive here with you."

"And Maya? We have her now."

Kinley nods into my shoulder. "I don't think she's the last we'll meet here."

That sounds about right, somehow.

xliv.

What, indeed, now, I am wondering too, from far, from the cool & calm of a familiar perch, & I don't know, & I don't know. I look into the music & it tells me nothing is undeducible to beat & breath—and I nod, it's what music would say—

I look to the lights of this beloved courtyard & they suggest the shadows, passing, stationary, but otherwise, not much—

The trees are here always, green & blooming tonight, but every weather, I suppose the fact of these four trees is more solid than much else—I sat here with many I'll not see again, same space, other tables, other years—

The story doesn't just lead to Clover-dale or Wynter—

The question is could Dreamland be traveled to another way, & thus a different relation, a different commerce—

I'm not convinced there's not more to it, & yet for now just words on a page, a sense that dreams are for something as every other human physical & psychical function seems for something

I see them as the untamed lands in the dullest human beast, where the daytime conditioning does not rule, does not presumptively own—

Dreams are the wilderland when nothing else seems to remain wild—

I see many chess games around me & it is a game of combat & order, deep strategies—yes, not my game, I'm trying for something else, an anti-game? Music before it is played, dreams in cocoon, how the hand rests, where the eye longs, before any want?

Dreamland. Imaginal Space. I'm not sure which words if any.

What the ships overhead intend, if it can be deduced, involves loosing a lot of power on the planet to see if it evolves bodily in countless variety to arrive at some unknown result? No. I would guess the opposite. Loose the power, see what happens. Let consciousness come, let it clash, let it explain. Does it eventually come to a variegated peace, a balance to hold, or does it collapse, powerfully, slowly? And, if so, can the possibilities of Dreamland, Imaginal Space, be left untried? Ever untried?

xlvi.

Maya's dreaming me, again, which I sometimes find funny & less often she does.

We sit, by her choice, in this cafe courtyard at a table I favor for writing, she's looking at me expectantly.

"What?"

She smirks cutely.

"Yes. That's not new."

She wiggles in her seat.

"Nor that."

She looks around at people half her intelligence, on phones, playing cards, feeding.

"What, Maya?"

"Let's go over it again."

"No."

"Yes."

"Please."

I sigh. "It never changes."

"You tell it. Let me try."

I sigh.

She smiles, sincerely, & I surrender.

"I woke that morning, early, writhing, no more sleep, I felt clawed awake, it was a memory, an old one"

"The term paper you wrote in high school. The teacher."

"Yes. How I let him down. I didn't intend to."

"All you wanted was to fuck a cheerleader."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because that's what I was trained to want. Slender girls in short skirts, smiling as though friendly, as

though sex with them would be sugar, reward, arrival.”

“Or the poet girl.”

“Yes.”

“Why her?”

“She actually liked me a little. We were friends.”

“Not enough for you.”

“No.”

“You wanted sex.”

“I wanted her to be mine. I wanted to possess her & have it be known I did.”

“She didn’t.”

“She was just a conditioned female & I was no prize. I was raw & from dubious stock. Nobody advised her that I was a good one to mate with, or practice with.”

“You see that now.”

“I’ve seen it for a long time. It does not help. I don’t get those years back.”

“The teacher.”

“He was fat, bald, & lonely, bookish in a crowded high school full of hormones & indifference to all else.”

“I liked your writing.”

“He saw I cared & I had talent.”

“Until you helped your school bully friend cheat.”

“Then he turned on me.”

“Why?”

“I’d ask now. I’d fucking ask how you would expect a lost lonely poor horny boy to act when the one tough who protects him for unknown reasons asks a few answers on a fucking test. I had no fucking friends of that kind but him. What did I care? That place was an evil zoo I suffered in when not skipping.”

Maya says nothing, calming me.

“Would fucking a cheerleader have helped?”

“Yes.”

“Really?”

“You build yourself from what you have at hand, what’s given you, what you learn, what you think you are. So, yes, if a cheerleader had fucked me, I would have been different. Or the poet girl.”

“Better?”

“No. Maybe worse. Maybe then haunted by that. I’m the kind that gets haunted, that makes his stock & trade off want, absence, distance, music drummed up from such things.”

“Should I put on a cheerleader’s costume?”

“No.”

“This is my dream.”

“Don’t.”

“What then?”

“Help Kinley & Christina.”

“Do what, Raymond? Why are we in Clover-dale?”

“I don’t know yet.”

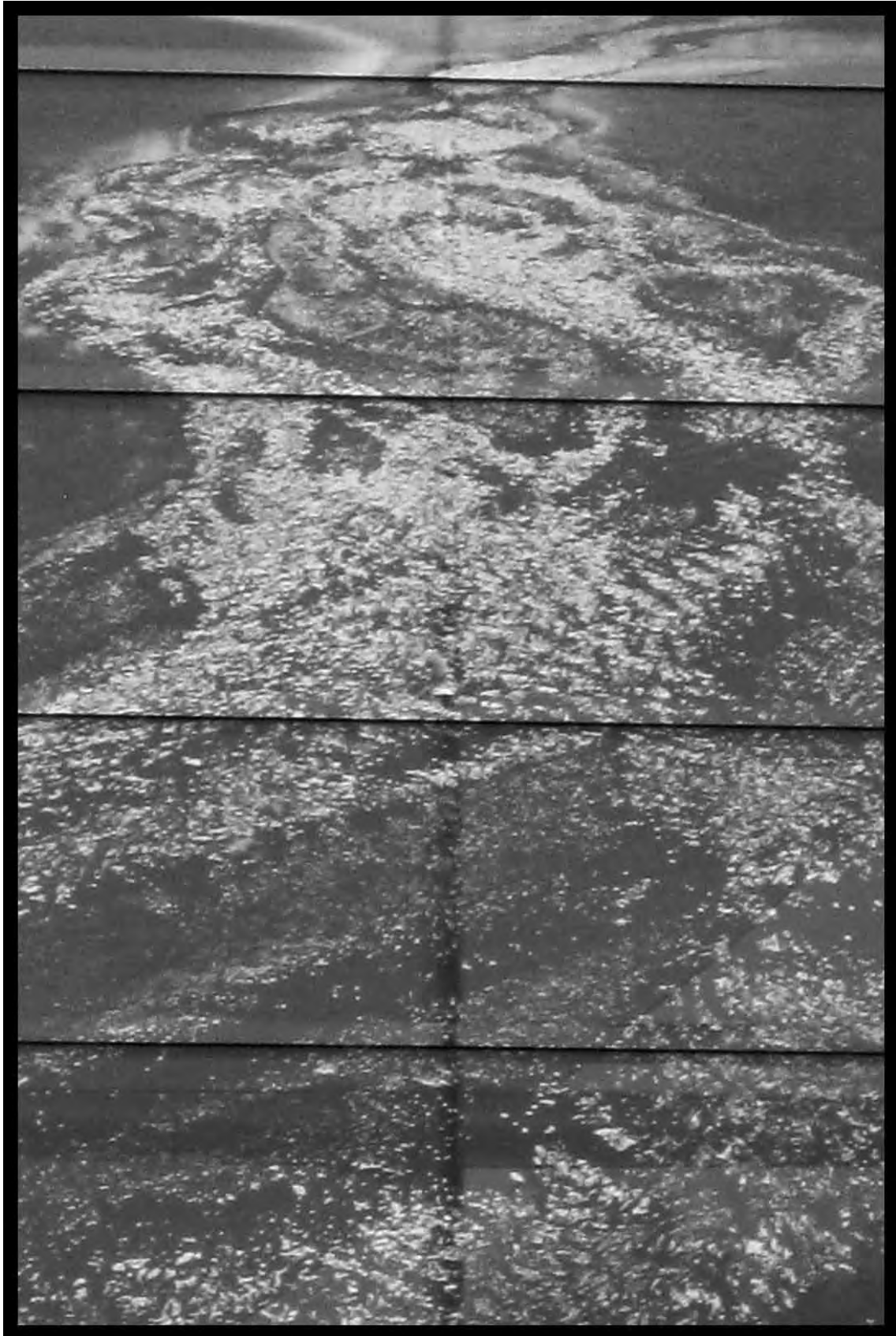
“Dreamspace.”

“I think so. Yes. Somehow.”

“*Tell me.*”

“I can’t.”

Maya relaxes again, across from me, her pink Jimi Hendrix shirt, her pink striped blonde hair. Blue



eyes.

"We'll keep going for you."

"Yes."

She nods. The trees of the courtyard are green & lovely, shiver in the lightest breeze. Perfect night. The air almost unfeeling.

xlvi.

I took that class in some way to become something different. I knew what Jamie wanted from the start. I knew he wouldn't wait forever. I was looking for a hook, an escape. A thought to help me know what to do next. I mean I eventually figured this all out but you're asking, right? You want to know?

Yes, Maya.

It was a literature class, the only one that hadn't started yet or filled up. So it was sort of random. But I liked it.

The teacher was old, really tall & thin & old. He seemed sort of blind to students, like he was talking to someone else. He would tell stories, or start to. I liked them, it felt strange & dangerous.

The class was full & they didn't get him. The girls chewed gum & looked at their phones, wore short skirts & ignored the boys. They didn't look at me in my ragged clothes. That was fine.

He started talking even stranger the last night I went. I mean, the story we had to read was James Joyce, "The Dead." Irish nationalism & sentiment. But sort of pretty. I liked it, I guess.

But when he talked, it was about an old movie. "The one with Bing Crosby & that young starlet." He groped for her name. "It doesn't matter. Most of that story doesn't matter. All that matters is the dead boy." He got back on topic, like he was jerked then stopped. "No. What is her name?"

Nobody was watching, I was. He was talking to the air: "You asked me the question I am still not answering after all this time. If I answer, I will lose you. If I answer, you will smile, & turn away, & think of other things." He was crying into the air & nobody saw. I stood up & now everyone froze.

"Sir."

"It's OK. Sit. Listen." Now he was looking at me. Hard. It's like we were alone in the class. He talked. I listened. He talked & talked.

"From the basement we protested, it was tight & dirty, & I kept forgetting what against. The king? A bent idea called God? There was a girl, warm, a light on her face I craved, a belief in all this. The poetry of it.

"And I turned to my old comrade. We'd been running a long time. He would usually find bits like her, a few words, into a shadow. He'd nod later.

"I looked at myself in a mirror. I hadn't in a long time. *Oh my*. It's been a rough stretch, I turned & explained, but nobody was there. Just that smile of hers. A line of poetry."

He stopped right there. Looked at me. "Why are you in my classroom?"

I stared at him.

"Go. Go now. Now!"

So I did. I went back to Jamie's house & I packed & I left.

"Maya."

"Yes."

xlvi.

“But did he fuck you, Maya.”
 “No, he didn’t.”
 “I wrote it.”
 “You were wrong. That’s what he told Muddy.”
 “How do you know?”
 She looks at me. “He wanted to. He tried. He whispered & pleaded & licked & I touched him there & I moaned a little.”
 “He fucked you.”
 “No.”
 “I wrote it.”
 “You were wrong.”
 “Was I?”
 “You guessed. That’s what seemed right.”
 “You let him lick you & you jerked him off.”
 “Yes. Once.”
 “How long were you with him?”
 “Not long.”
 “This is a strange turn. You telling me what I got wrong.”
 She nods.
 “Are you dreaming me again?”
 “I guess so. Does it matter?”
 “It does, Maya, to me.”
 “Then yes. Just like last time.”
 “But you’re correcting me.”
 “Just that. You got it wrong.”
 “I still don’t like that.”
 “Would you really like it if he had?”
 “No. Not really.”
 “What then?”
 “It’s a precedent.”
 “To what.”
 “Other things I got wrong.”
 “Maybe. Maybe not.”

“Maya. Wake up. It’s OK. It’s Kinley. Christina is showering. We have to go.”

Maya gives me a dirty look as they all pack what little they brought & quickly go.

xlvi.

The movie, **RemoteLand**, whatever it may be, begins with a car crash running backward. Charlie convulses & nods, this is familiar.

Which is to say, OK, & he leans forward a bit but the film shifts a bit. (Was this the Gate-Keeper’s doing? What does a Gate-Keeper do anyway?)

It’s a party, Charlie remembers now, he’d seen this car crash filmed? It was his car, yes, the one he’d driven to the theater that other time (other time? Other theater?)

But it was a party, it was in some kind of ruin, he’d gotten invited as a novelty, his ideas were

fragments & pastiches, but they saw he could paint. Really, *freakily* good. The bunch of them would talk him into coming to their place in the woods, bring his paintings, they'd eat handfuls of gelcaps (acid? E?) & they'd groove to his pictures, get crazy from them, naked, bonfires, the girls, two of them, they'd give him a taste, a grope of titty, maybe a feel down his jeans, one he could tell wasn't into it, the other had to be held back a little, the paintings *really* did something to her—

They weren't his friends, didn't notice him in school, even the girl who sorta liked him.

It got weirder than acid & fires in the woods. It was like they felt his power, maybe more than he did. He liked his own paintings but he wasn't conscious of their power—

But that party out there in the ruins, it's like he was there to show off—to *be shown off*—

He'd gotten a car, a used one, earned the money himself, used fewer colors in his pictures—

That freaked them out—they kept asking—

The girl who was reluctant pressed him the most. Oh his fingers got to know her well, all sorts of teases & half-kept promises—& the questions—

“Why no more salmon?”

“Uh,” he grunted, trying to lean in close enough to lick those nipples but her hand on his cock took over.

“Why no salmon in your new pictures, Charlie?”

“I. Uh.”

“Tell me. You want more.”

“Yes. Uh.”

The one who liked him wouldn't—he came on her arguing with the guys. It got ugly.

“We need to know, you fucking bitch.”

“Fuck you.”

“There's nothing left to hold back. You've fucked all of us.”

“Ask him.”

They pushed her. Threatened. Pled.

She wouldn't.

Flawless ass. Freckles. Told him she lived on a farm for awhile. Told it with a disturbed look, like she didn't tell it much. Why him? She didn't know. Would he have told her that night it was stupid as more money for that car out back of this place with no roof?

He would have told her anything now, seeing her push back. Was ready to dare & step in when there were shouts in the street—

They'd cleared it of all of the wreckage, the stumps & bushes, cleared it completely & lining it now on both sides were film cameras, dozens of them, maybe hundreds, but old style, back to the hand-grinding days, mounted & in amongst the newest camcorders & older models, so many on either side.

And down the street, as though waiting on cue, was his car. His fucking car! The moment he saw he was grabbed by about five guys, grabbed & held tight as he was dragged to his car & belted into his seat, his hands taped to the wheel, the wheel locked in place so it could not turn, & his feet tied together below—& before he could cry a word, someone leaned in & pushed a heavy stone onto the gas, & he was accelerating, past all those cameras, crying faces, faster & faster until—

wham!

xlix.

“Mm Mm” sighs his friend as he turns up the volume on his stereo, Grateful Dead, Nov 30, 1973, Boston Music Hall, “Weather Report Suite” into “Dark Star Jam” into “Eyes of the World” into “Sugar Magnolia,” the cassette had been played so many times it squealed at points but his friend kept carefully restoring it to order

“Make a copy”

“No. This one.”

“A copy of it?”

“No. I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Some things you let run their course, Charlie. You play them through.”

“It’s a *cassette*. It’s not even the whole show.”

“I lost the other.”

That’s a lot of talk for those nights, the hashish & the Dead would usually possess them into a listening, smoking trance & sometimes Charlie would be back in that city, that ruin on the edge of city limits, & he would play it out different, run toward her arguing, not the other way toward the street & cameras & his car—

Sometimes he would step forward & take some punches but she wouldn’t leave him. She would tend him while they go out to the street, check out the noise.

“We have to go.”

“Go. No. Charlie. It’s OK.”

“It’s not. It’s really not. I need you to come with me. Now.”

“I can’t. Charlie.”

He would leave her. Figure there wasn’t much other way. Sometimes he would explain.

“It was to buy a car.”

“What?”

“Fewer colors in my paintings. I was saving up.”

Once, she came. She helped him up, she put her support to his bad side, the side he’d taken the fists, & they would leave the back way, through broken fences, half-burnt houses, walk & walk until he was exhausted & groaning & she wasn’t much better, & they found a patch of woods nearby that looked promising & limped in, maybe a little ways more, there, ahead, a clearing—

And he would see the White Bunny & remember her all over again, & follow her into the clearing & lay with this girl & know it would be alright, the White Bunny had led him to safety, as before, & he—

Click! The cassette would stop.

l.

It’s just this: there were a lot of years. A lot of them. Maybe a lot of films, light bulbs, car wrecks—

Things moved faster for awhile & he kept his hand on the wheel, accelerating, & sometimes it felt real to him

Visiting his brother in Boston, two tickets to Game 7 Celtics-Philly, winner goes to conference finals,

they were celebrating his brother had gotten a job as a guitar teacher, had convinced everyone he'd needed to—*oh so sweet*—& Charlie had scored them the tickets—& it was a close game, of course, down to the yelling final seconds—

& later at the bar, more drunk than they should have been, & that meant horny & *that* meant sniffing out the place, one of those stupid places his brother knew too well, the girls bored & huddled for easy attention except for one who separated herself from the rest & was now at their table, matching whiskey shots, & making out with both of them in turn till it got to be her face was kissing one & moaning as the other got a hand up her frilly white dress for some play, long curly brown hair, deep playful green eyes, honey skin, half leaned onto their table in the shadowed corner

Hours later he half wakes on the floor of his brother's apartment's living room. He's alone. Staggers into the bedroom. Nothing.

Collapses on the bed, clothes, shoes still on. Dreams they are watching a pattern on the wall, a labyrinth, fading, right to left, how to travel it. His brother's fingers tapping the tune of it, he heard it in his mind too, & a few steps more to daylight, if not answers, numberless paths, if not a way, a next day's chance.

"Letting go the map, Charlie"

"Hm."

"Let go the map."

"Map? What?"

"*Let it go, Charlie.*"

"It's your best chance."

li.

The first time I walked out of that hospital, for some reason, I found myself at a bar nearby. I'd walked some city blocks but it was hot—I think it was hot—

And I wasn't sure where to go—I think I wanted a sandwich—

So I walked into this place & sat down at the bar.

"Hi there."

"Hi. Do you have food?"

"I think some left. There's some nice chili, maybe fixings for a sandwich."

The barman smiled at me. He didn't know where I'd been, or maybe didn't care. But he tended me. Took me over to a table, got me a napkin, some silverware.

The chili was spicy, I ate it like I'd starved a week in war. The sandwich was vegetables, some kind of sauce.

Didn't ask if I drank. Nice glass of iced water. Kind as a mother.

The TV was showing some priest or preacher, he'd said the world was going to end. It didn't. He didn't look contrite. He looked humbled but . . . happy.

"The lord does not explain these things. These are the days when you submit to his mystery." He was standing on a cliff, near a lighthouse. An island. "You see your fallibility. Your small place in things." He gestured to the ocean. The sky. "And you carry on. You pray & you carry on."

Hmm. Bet the boys in the press didn't like that one.

I left there, reluctantly. Waited till it got busy, the barman still looking over at me, smiling, but tied up. Took my chance & darted out.

Oh I shouldna. I wasn't walking far before I saw that bent figure hurrying away, & I followed him, he seemed to disappear between streetlights & I kept following.

And it got to be raining—& I think it got to be other cities too—he'd get a sack from a store sometimes—& hurry on—I learned to do the same—kept from starving that way—

Followed him into a building finally, up steps, dark stairwell, his steps hard to hear anymore, narrow stairs, how many flights? & onto a floor, all silent, all silent like noise didn't exist & the open door at the end of the hall, & I pushed in finally, I pushed into the one-room apartment with the lightbulb & I put my sack on the table, & I sat on the bed, & I reached up to turn off that light but something happened again—

"It's like that old song of skeletons in the moonlight," he'd said with his hookah pipe dangling from his lip. "You hear the music but you don't get the words until you stop listening & *glow*"

lii.

The secret to his youthful work, the two great steel edifices he raised in the forest, to decay at their own pacing, was that in one he embedded a live something of himself, & in the other something of the world, important, captured, & it was not what many later took it for, two great black steel hearts, erected in the forest, a primordial valentine—something vital was caught & captured in each—kept from each other, from the world—

liii.

"How do we get there, Preacher?"

"To Dreamland?"

"Yes. How?"

"We fuck, Genny. We fuck."

"Tweety Bird too?"

"Yes. Tweety Bird too. Tweety especially."

Long hours after long hours she hears a voice in her ears, it's her own, it's Tweety's, it's Preacher's.

"There were two tomes. One told the sky. One sang the earth. Was this a choice?"

"Like the left hand or right. And dispose the other."

liv.

the red tinge.

A Love Supreme.

A dream of desolation

Ragged claws, ragged claws,

A mind sliced & revealed

A new dream, a bigger dream.

No longer a dream at all.

Remember everything but lightly.

There is no higher

*There is no ground
We kiss
And you are mine once more.*

***There are only two tomes.
One tells the sky.
One sings the earth.***

Preacher.

She stirs. Then sleeps deeper. Preacher beside her nods, lets her deeper.

“Are you ready?” asks Tweety.
He nods.

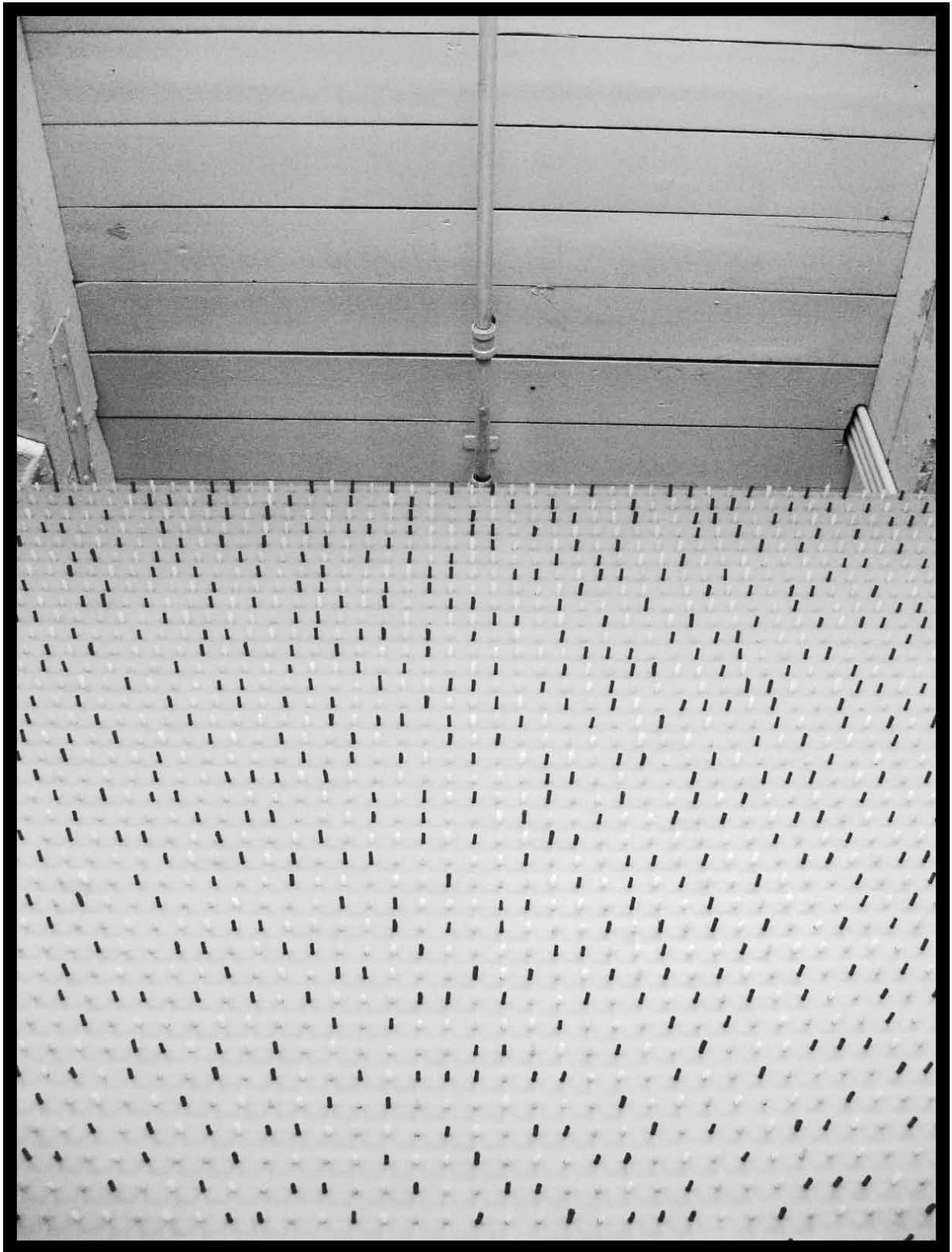
It was in the book you were reading that night, Genny, the very act of reading those words, a kind of spell, a set of deep instructions—

Genny nudges closer to him, sighing, Preacher lets & lets a little more, allows himself to grasp, to hold, Genny, we know the dark patches, keep them close, *oh so close*, keep those crevassed places close, like they are something not nothing, like a magick, like therein a release, an arcing high over this how, this why, some other beginning, a new knowing, a wild forgetting, like the poisons harvested from the dark patches can fruit a balm, a healing from the farthest stars within, a fruit to bite into with a cry, ride its pains, ride hard its pains, *just play through*, & soon or at last the knowing what gives breath like song to all—

Singing grasps it all & language just the visible exhaust—

Go on in, Genny, go in—
I'll follow—I'm waiting—
Tweety too—

“Preacher”
“I'm here, Genny”
“Here, where?”
“Well, Dreamland.”
“Why can't I see it?”
“Your eyes are closed, Genny”
“Are we still in bed?”
“No.”
“Then I don't want to open my eyes.”
“Why?”
“Took me too long to get you to myself in any bed. I'm not ready to leave it yet.”
“Genny.”
“No. Tell me the story.”
“Which?”
“The one that brings you to me. Here. In this way. As who you are.”
“Oh.”
“Tell me.”



MASS MoCa Series #11

"Genny, I've been wrong about more things than right."

"Am I with you?"

"Yes."

"Then you did something really right."

"And you won't open your eyes until I tell?"

"No. That would mean arriving, wouldn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then, no, Preacher."

He nods. "I met him in a dream of desolation."

"Who?"

"My best friend."

"Where is he?"

"He's gone."

"Oh."

"This was many years ago. We would talk, shout, try to outdo each other, like young men do."

"In this dream."

"Yes. Well."

"What?"

"They can have continuity."

"Eh?"

"It becomes like crossing between countries."

"Dreams?"

"Yes."

"So your friend?"

"He was in dreams. Hadn't always been there."

"Oh."

"He gave me a device when he went away."

"Away?"

"His device was to play cassettes that he would send me."

"In dreams?"

"No. His cassettes came in the mail. The device was real."

"Uh?"

"We'd established a bond. It crossed."

Genny nods, eyes still shut. Thinks a moment. "What did the cassettes say? Were they letters?"

"Yes. I would get them in the mail wrapped in brown paper, unstamped, just my name written on them."

"What did they say?"

"He was unsure at first. He kept close to the familiar for a while. Traveled to Germany, drank beers. Thailand for—"

"Sex?"

"Yes. He was testing it. The pleasures were first."

"And?"

"At first they were the same. He hadn't had too many . . . loves growing up. He indulged."

"I bet."

"Nothing forbidden any longer. And it was good. Then it . . . waned."

"He got enough poon?"

"He got more interested in other things."

"What?"

"I don't know. But in the cassettes he was singing. One song I remembered, '*Ragged claws, ragged claws*,

a mind sliced away & revealed, ragged claws, ragged claws, those walls aren't high enough to protect the world from me, my music is bark & root, I'll travel by soil, sup on the starlight, ragged claws, ragged claws, a mind sliced & revealed.

"What was he saying?"

"I didn't know. Then the last cassette came. Called *Last Songs*."

"Couldn't you go to him?"

"Dreamland isn't like that, Genny."

"Like what?"

"He was far from me. He preferred it that way. I've always traveled Dreamland alone too."

"Until now."

"Yes."

"Am I a burden?"

"No."

"A danger?"

"No. I've learned more since then. There's dangers here no matter what, just different kinds."

"What did the cassette say?"

"I got it the day after another of my possession dreams"

"Possession?"

"Something in me would take over & I would end up in places with pretty girls, very pretty girls, most fooling around with it, with what was possible."

"What did you do?"

"What do you think?"

"I think you fucked them"

"What else?"

"They weren't very good?"

"Not at first"

"But then?"

"I'd find her Beast"

"Beast?"

"Beast, Genny. I would root in her until I found her freak beast. Then I would encase her in mirrors endlessly high, coax, coax, coax, until that was all there was. Sweat. Snap."

Genny thinks a moment. "What did the cassette say?"

"I don't know. It was all squallings, like he was in a desert, or ocean, or both. He wasn't coming back to me. I played the cassette that morning, in the bar where you waited for me, where I would play every cassette, & I knew he was gone."

"Is that it?"

"No."

"There's a woman."

"Yes."

"Still?"

"Not really."

"That's the worst kind."

"I suppose you're right."

"Tell me."

"We met at Iconic Square."

"Where's that?"

"A city."

"Which one?"

"I'm not sure. Possibly more than one."

“What do you mean?”
 “I mean it’s a kind of a place, not one of a sort.”
 “Kind?”
 “Its waters are special.”
 “Special?”
 “Dosed, Genny. Lightly with LSD.”
 “Really?”
 “Yes. I met her there with her friends.”
 “Oh.”
 “I’d discovered it on my way to kill myself.”
 “Again?”
 “Something was wrong with my friend & I could not save him.”
 “So you were in despair?”
 “That makes it sound pretty.”
 “And her?”
 “She waylaid me.”
 “Waylaid?”
 “Genny I’d figured out I was going to find a way back in from there.”
 “But she?”
 “She came back later that day. Without her friends.”
 “Smart girl.”
 “She knew that I hadn’t been paying attention to them when they sat down on my bench, flirtatious, asking me what I was reading.”
 “Knew what?”
 “It’s the fountain, isn’t it?”
 “Hm?”
 “Look, Mister, these nice legs are usually more than enough to keep a gentleman’s attention.”
 “Yes. They are nice.”
 “Do you think so?”
 “I’m sorry if I didn’t . . . notice you adequately.”
 Genny laughs & nods. Listens.
 “She led me to her bed that night. It wasn’t hard to do. She lived in a single room but with huge windows. Unshaded at night while we made love in her bed, then on her floor.”
 “Lucky girl.”
 “Part of me stayed with her, wanted to stay with her always. Why not?”
 “Your friend.”
 “Yes. And my own heart. She would find me often at Iconic Square & was . . . jealous.”
 “Of a square?”
 “One night we were walking an avenue, holding hands. She stopped us & directed my gaze into a streetlamp. ‘Look deep,’ she said. ‘Deep as you can.’ I did.”
 “And?”
 “She turned my glare-stricken eyes her way, to her face. ‘That’s how I need you to love me,’ she said. Then we walked on.”
 “Didn’t you try to explain?”
 “She brought her friends around. It’s like she was sharing or boasting or trying to get it all on the record before it ended.”
 “Did you fuck them?”
 “It’s what she wanted.”
 “Were they good as her?”

"I hurt each a little, Genny. I did what I did then, when possessed, but I wasn't. I let one look up at me into my eyes, as she had never done with a man before. I let the other see the man she'd most hurt, let her see him in my face, release all she'd kept for him to me, it was all nothing."

"What then?"

"I brought her to the fountain that night, to drink with me, to know."

"There is no higher & there is no ground, drink the spray before we kiss."

"What is it?"

"Drink with me."

"*Oh.*"

"Drink it with me & you will be mine again."

"I. *Oh.*"

"Drink. Drink with me. Drink the spray."

"*Oh. Yes.*"

"Your lips. Your ruining kiss."

"*Oh.*"

"There is no higher & there is no ground."

"*Yes. Oh.*"

"Kiss me, across the abyss. Do you see it between us?"

"*Yes. Oh.*"

"Kiss me. I am yours."

"*Oh. Yes.*"

Genny opens her eyes. She is sitting with Preacher. There is the fountain. Tweety Bird is in her lap.

"Iconic Square?"

"Yes, Genny."

lv.

"Can you walk, Penny?"

"Yes, Jack. I'm fine."

"Good. I'm glad."

"Where are we going?"

"To the movies."

"Where?"

"I knew it as Nada Film School."

"The one you went to when you were young? I remember."

"But there's more to it."

"More?"

"I'm not sure how to explain."

"But you're bringing me there?"

"Yes."

"Will Christina be there?"

"I don't know."

Penelope stops them, this vague walking on this Bridge of Glass.

"Jack"

"Yes."

"Look at me."

"I am."

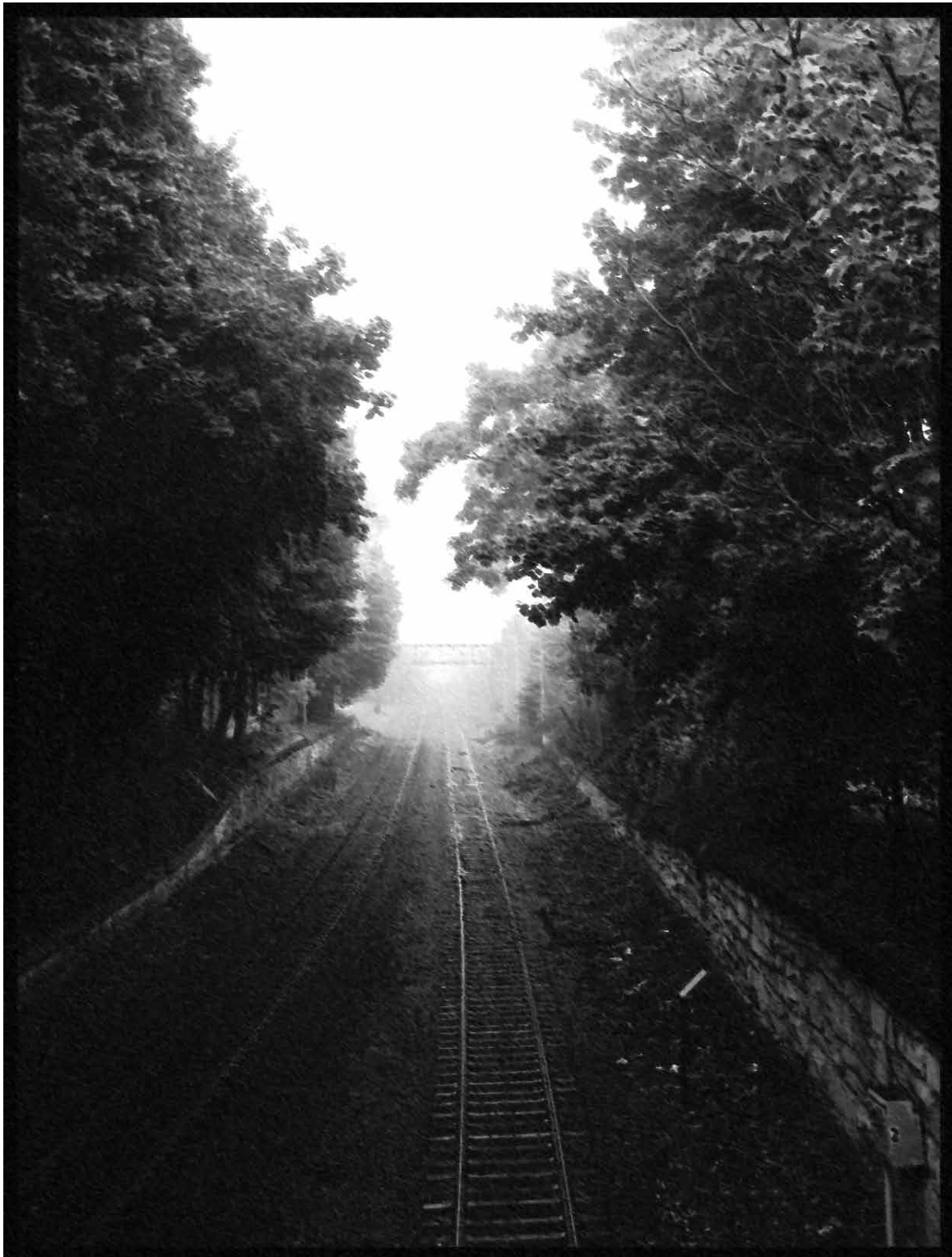
"*Look at me.*"

“I am.”
 “What do you see?”
 “I see you. Penelope. My Penny.”
 “What else?”
 “Else?”
 “What more?”
 “I see . . . her.”
 “Christina?”
 “Yes. You are both. Connected. Something.”
 “Yes. Something.”
 “Don’t you know?”
 “No. You confused us.”
 “Yes. But.”
 “Something happened. We agreed. She & I.”
 “Agreed?”
 “To allow you confusion. Let it be.”
 “And? What?”
 “This. Me with you now, her less so. But always some. She hasn’t let go yet.”
 “Are you the same?”
 “No. It’s the wrong question.”
 “When then?”
 Penelope smiles & takes Jack’s hand again. “Let’s get there *soon*.”

lvi.

“Jack?”
 “Yes, Penny.”
 She smiles. Hands him his old yellow toothbrush. Fresh tube of toothpaste.
 “You only get one set, right?”
 He smiles. “That’s what he said to me.”
 “You told me. I remember.”
 “I don’t know what any of this is, Penny. I thought I was dead.”
 “But?”
 “I don’t know. Seem like being dead would either be more restful or make more sense than this.”
 Penny laughs.
 “We have to stick together, Penny. This time, no matter what.”
 “I know. We will.”
 “No matter what.”
 “Yes. We will.”
 “There are others here. Not just Christina. There was a room, like a hotel room. We met there. We were trying to figure out what this was, what to do.”
 “Did you?”
 “No. Not really. I think we played a card game with blank cards. I don’t know.”
 “Are we going back to that room?”
 “I’m not sure. But I know I saw the Nada Film School here & I want to bring you there first.”
 Penny nods.

They walk on & on, hand in hand, & it’s hard to guess if they walked real miles or through real hours. They could have arrived without all the effort anyway. But Jack insisted.



And there it is. And both sides of the marquee now say

RemoteLand Midnite Showing

And Jack takes Penny's hand all the tighter in his as they walk in, through the lobby, past the concessions stand, into the theatre itself, take their seats together.

lvii.

For a moment on the screen there is just color, floating color, electrified through with more color, floating & then a sense of life in those colors, those colors are alive, how, yet still, something lights up & floats—there, on the screen, you can see them, they light up & float—

lviii.

None other but sing true, call it deep vow, brutal hand up the sky, to the endless night, call it hard flutter from what slow breathes within, call it the remaining clod from a thousand stellar & fool hours, still dangling close,

*still a grasp to the wheel
still a fang in new dreams,
hours of trilling grace, hours
shattering deeper within minute
by—*

minute—
*foul silences of waiting, fouler
still when
the words come out—
to preserve one heart or torso—
at the shedding of another—*

Maya turns to me, all
sweetness & melody, nodding,
smiling—

*None other but sing true as the steerage gives way, sweetness falls now distant, the breathless hover of youth
but another plan of raw memory by plank
of ruined wish
by plank of what hungers flatten the wall & which blood to rule, & the blight of bruises kept close in a bag
none other may touch or know*

*“there is no bag”
none may touch or know me
“there is no bag”*

this what becomes in the awful place to sing truer, oh, crank it, climb it, crawl further in, is any safe safe enough?

Jasmine, Ashleigh, Toby—they nod—they come—

None other but sing true, down streets where dozers mingle, crowd stores for a quart & a picture of half eaten pie, sing true, wail when the note eludes, cry, croak, when a mug of heat is explaining comfort for years & then less so—

Genny. Preacher.

the room more clearly on the movie screen now. its walls of fire. its ceiling of stars. its floor of moonlight. its couch of silver melody. its bed of blue light & red gold.

lix.

True, sing true, said the book while a skinny yip of pages & now pounds later, says the same deep vow to the endless night, brutal hand to the sky harder still, sing true, yes, I will shake & flake, a clumsy bullet in its chute, this is how, how's why, why's truth, a bush & its fruit flaming & poison to everything known, true, sing—

*or the shined face warped below
with its slaven pride & woe*

make it good make it good

*tell you everything for a kiss
make it good make it good*

*tell you how everyone comes
but nobody ever stays—*

Sing true, nights barking empty to skies tinned with brights, sing it with both hands, both hearts, all three, every one, what releases when shook, hard want of shake & flake, teaching skin to shine without sun, lean to wet burble but come only a few words & none ever stay—

*the inner scratch wished is knowing
not by name alone—*

*What's coming but seeds of years,
harm & heal—only lesson is
yearn's—only path is humble's—
only truth is Art's*

*there are only two ways of touch
choice is a slide—ranges with will—*

Rebecca nods, keeps drawing.
Does not look up.
Dylan nods. Does not look up.

Breathe. Again. The first turn left or right & none come back. The first note a cry, a croak, a wet noise, a

challenge to all listening, & to every note to come—

True. Sing true.

lx.

Left or right. I'm certain I don't know. Let me try to say as best I can.

RemoteLand is showing what is to be seen hereon. It is live somehow, in some other kind of way, progressive & yet—

We know the White Woods, yes, & there is a town within called Wytner, in the middle of the White Woods, in the middle of a clearing there, in full moonlight when its temple becomes outlined there is a desert. In the middle of the desert, its center & far reaches alike.

Within Wytner is the place called Clover-dale. Clover-dale is both a dead place & a live one too. Many of us are there, we have been led there by the once dead troubadour Jim Reality III, he had led many of us there, & far within we come to a room—

The room's windows are broken & look out to fields. Its floor is exposed to earth, is nearly gone. It is the room to be arrived at now, tonight, it is the farthest depth to it all thus far—

Within this room in a corner there are objects of great importance, only manifest there tonight to show everyone—

they are most important—

four of them—they look three of them look—alike, like laundry bags, sort of grey & black decorated, maybe nothing so distinguished but very important—

& the fourth one is different from the others—it is red—it is the red bag—

“The red bag?”

“This is the way in to Dreamland now. The only way left. They closed the lanes. All the rest. The sole purpose of Clover-dale is to shroud the existence of this red bag. It is the only way in or out of Dreamland that is not closed, or muted—”

All are watching from the Hotel Noah room, which is being broadcast by **RemoteLand** to the audience that all needed may be gathered—

The Red Bag

When the glaring lights have left
 When the music has slowed to smoke
 When there is sniff of good blood & then no more
 When touch brittles maybe to break
 When best taste is old & cold, hurts

The red bag, doorway back to dreams
 The red bag, the path, come
 The red bag, come, trust, come here.

"What do we do now, Raymond?"

"I'm not sure."

"Are we all supposed to enter the Red Bag?"

"I don't know."

I nod forward. Maya takes my hand & she's got it inside her thin blouse before I jerk back. "Quit it."

"Pay attention."

"I don't know."

"What's all this?"

"It's as far as I know. The Red Bag. I don't know more right now."

"Why is everyone together?"

"You all had to see. Maybe it shows up multiply, maybe it will help."

"What else?"

"I don't know."

"Tell me."

"The Red Bag is where it all crosses, everything I have created so far, the Red Bag is the nexus"

"What do we do with it?"

"It's a new way to Dreamland."

"How?"

"You enter, & Dreamland is *that way*. Not by sleep."

"How?"

"I don't know."

"How?"

"There's a land. Imagianna. A princess. Not what she seemed. But she can point the way to Dreamland. It ends the closings. They are meaningless by this new way. *You don't need to sleep to go to Dreamland—*"

"Is that where we're supposed to go? Tell us."

"I don't know."

Maya hugs me, rests me against her.

"It's OK. He doesn't know. But he will. It's in the nature of this book to seek the music for answers, & then seek more. So now it's the Red Bag. We'll go. Some or all of us."

And it fades again. All the gathering, the many faces, the close union, even Maya. I am left sitting in my seat, alone, writing this page & wondering what next, alone, but not for long—

Just not knowing—

The Red Bag

The Red Bag?

Yes. The music I hear.

OK then.



To be continued in Cenacle | 84 | April 2013

* * * * *



MASS MoCa Series #12

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NEW ENGLAND

Notes on Contributors

Charlie Beyer lives in Oreana, Idaho. His “Travel to Belize” journal was published in *Cenacles* #78-81. One hopes he soon meets a millionaire who orders a dozen hovercrafts from him. More of his writings can be found at <http://therubyeye.blogspot.com>.

Joe Coleman lives in Melrose, Massachusetts. His poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. One hopes for his prosperity as a fledgling poet & professional artist.

Judih Haggai lives at Kibbutz Nir Oz in Israel. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. One hopes the bombs stop falling in her area of the world, so people can live & work together in peace. Her work can be found online at: <http://tribes.tribe.net/poetryjams>.

Nathan D. Horowitz lives in Vienna, Austria. His poetry & prose appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. One hopes that he continues to enjoy & advance on the writing of his big book. More of his work can be found online at: <http://www.scribd.com/Nathan%20Horowitz> and <http://lordarbor.bandcamp.com>.

Martina Newberry lives in Hollywood, California. Her poetry appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. One hopes she & husband Brian continue to prosper in their Art & lives. Her website is <http://rollwiththechanges.org>.

Jonathan TALAT Phillips lives in Brooklyn, New York. His writing is new to the pages of *The Cenacle*. He is an author, bio-energetic healer, & co-founder of Evolver.net & Reality Sandwich. One hopes he continues to do his good work, giving & receiving kind benefits. More about him can be found at talathealing.com.

Jelalludin Rumi was born in 1273 in Konya (present-day Turkey), & died in 1273. He is rightly regarded as one of the world's greatest poets. His poetry in this issue was also reprinted in a volume in the 1999 Burning Man Books series (<http://www.scriptorpress.com/nobordersbookstore.html>)

Tom Sheehan lives in Saugus, Massachusetts. His writing appears regularly in *The Cenacle*. One hopes for Tom continued good fortune when he rises before dawn to sit at his keyboard & compose poetry & prose.

Kassandra Soulard lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. One hopes for her that some fine day *Firefly* returns to television, & also that Bob Seger & the Silver Bullet Band give a free concert on the Boston Common.

Raymond Soulard, Jr. lives in Arlington, Massachusetts. One hopes for him more happy days writing sequels & successors to *The Tangled Gate*.

Zannemarie Lloyd Taylor lives north of Boston, Massachusetts. She hosts the monthly Out Loud Open Mic gatherings (<http://www.outloudopenmike.com>). Her poetry last appeared in *Cenacle* | 80 | April 2012. One hopes for every happiness for her & her beloved new husband.

* * * * *





We all know success when we all find our own dreams
And our love is enough to knock down any wall
And the future's been seen as men try to realize
The simple secret of the note in us all . . . in us all.

The Who, 1971.

